



Community Hygiene Output-based Aid Program in Vietnam (CHOBA)

Research on Institutional Factors Affecting Sanitation Implementation

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By Nga Dao Ngoc



east meets **west**



REPORT OUTLINE

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Acronyms

CTC	Conditional cash transfer
CHOBA	Community Hygiene output-based aid
CPC	Commune People's Committee
EMW	East Meets West
FGD	Focus group discussion
	Household
IEC	Information – Education – Communication
IDI	In-depth interview
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
OBA	Output-based approach
PMC	Provincial Preventive Medicine Center
PMB	Project Management Board
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PPC	Provincial People's Committee
VBSP	Vietnam Bank for Social Policy
WU	Women's Union
PWU	Provincial Women's Union
VND	Vietnam Dong
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings, lessons learned, and recommendations of the informative **Research on Institutional Factors Affecting Sanitation Implementation** of the “*Community Hygiene Output-based Aid (CHOBA)*” program in Vietnam (hereafter, the Program). The research was carried out in the period March to April, 2014, in Ninh Binh Province.

1.1 ABOUT THE PROJECT

East Meets West (EMW) has embarked on an even larger rural sanitation program in Vietnam and Cambodia with a USD 10.9 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Community Hygiene Output-based Aid (CHOBA) program seeks to provide improved sanitation to about 126,000 poor families across 245 communes in Vietnam over a 44-month period. Through complimentary actions by the communes - incentivized by EMW - the aim is to improve sanitation for nearly 1.5 million people. CHOBA builds not only on EMW’s own pilot operations but also on experiences from other programs in Vietnam and global best practice.

The CHOBA program is designed to influence households at critical stages of their decision making process using:

- An information and education campaign;
- Access to affordable credit (primarily from the Vietnam Bank for Social Policy, VBSP);
- Supply chain improvement through **training of masons**; and
- Incentives to poor households, the Women’s Union and its volunteers, and communes to participate in the program.

To reach these expected results, CHOBA pursued activities in partnership with key stakeholders, including:

- The **Vietnam Women’s Union** (VWU) chapters at the central, provincial, district and commune level are conducting the IEC campaign, facilitating access to credit and coordinating all field activities, including training of masons. Some **2,500 VWU volunteers** are engaged in the process, using gentle persuasion to encourage participation, advising on latrine options, and helping with loan applications
- The **Vietnam Health Environment Management Agency** (VIHEMA), the **Provincial Preventive Medical Centers** (PMCs) and health staff at the district and commune level are providing IEC materials and assisting in the training of masons.
- The **Vietnam Bank for Social Policy** (VBSP), through its provincial and district branches, provides credit to the project beneficiaries at the bank’s standard rates and terms.
- The Provincial People’s Committees and, especially, the **Commune People’s Committees** (CPC) are providing essential political and administrative support.

1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis framework applies the core values of problem-driven framework for Political Economy Analysis (PEA), developed by Daniel Harris, 2013. It is understood that the PEA will be a collaborative, issues-based and problem-based piece of work that is intended to provide a contextual analysis, as well as helping to give strategic direction to the program and providing specific inputs to the implementation in future.

1.2.1 Desk review

Program documentation was reviewed with the purpose of a) becoming familiar with the program and b) ensuring that existing data informed the findings and conclusions of the evaluation. The desk review covered: program documents, progress reports, baseline studies, monitoring data, IEC materials, training reports, and WSS coverage data for the program area, and any other documents/data which helped to shed light on the performance and context of the project.

1.2.2 Qualitative data collection

The consultant spent five days in the field to collect qualitative data for the analysis from March 23 to March 29, 2014. The field trip used a variety of qualitative data collection methods to collect data, including in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). IDIs and FGDs were conducted with partners at all levels, volunteers, and beneficiary groups, which included men and women. Qualitative data collection was carried out in two communes in each of two program districts. In addition to the commune and village level data collection, the team interviewed EMW staff and partners at provincial (PWU).

1.3. STUDY LIMITATIONS

Like many other studies, this study faced a number of limitations that could affect the accuracy of our some of findings. In this case, they included:

Limited scope of field research: The team was only able to have a total of eight focus group discussion with beneficiaries in the four target communes. By discussion with only “CHOBA list” households in each commune, there may be some risk that we have not gained a full understanding of project performance in the area, especially the targeting process which plays a very important role in project performance under the OBA. Due to the risk that no village and household (HH) visits could leave us with a biased picture, we also have not delivered into comparisons of performance between communes.

The analysis and conclusions that are made from our fieldwork should refer to sites in Ninh Binh Province only; therefore some discussions on project strategy approach may not be taken to be fully representative of the diversity of provinces covered by the project.

2. Key findings and discussions

This section builds up an overall picture of project performance by capturing the features behind the good performance and poor performance project communes. The main discussions focus on institutional and operational features for comparison of performance between communes.

2.1. STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS UNDER CHOBA PROGRAM

2.1.1. Provincial context

The Community Hygiene Output-based Aid (CHOBA) program was launched in Ninh Binh in mid-2012 and is expected to end in 2015. The program seeks to help poor, near poor, and economic hardship households access cheap credit to build solid and modern septic tank latrines or double-vaults composting latrines in order to improve sanitation and reduce water-borne infectious diseases, gradually change hygiene behaviors, and improve the health of the community.

The program is implemented in 40 communes of five districts, with the aim of supporting more than 15,000 poor families to build hygienic latrines. After more than a year of project implementation (from July 2012 to February 2014), the program has managed to mobilize CHOBA beneficiary households (poor, near poor, and economic hardship households) to build latrines, which resulted in more than 5,000 households rewarded with rebates, making up 30% of the original target. In 30 project communes, CHOBA beneficiaries' latrines contributed 10.19% increase of the hygienic latrine coverage.

The CHOBA program in Ninh Binh is being carried out during a time when Vietnam in general and Ninh Binh in particular are making numerous efforts to realize (i) the National Target Program on Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (NTP3) and (ii) The National Target Program on New Rural Development. Improving household access to hygienic water and sanitation is one of the main targets of both programs.

The New Rural Development (NRD) program is a comprehensive and extensive program covering various fields and contents, with a strategic vision for rural development in Vietnam. The program sets out a number of key criteria for the communes. This set of criteria includes 19 main criterion groups; each includes more specific criteria. To come up with a plan to ensure achievement of these criteria, each commune needs to carry out surveys and develop a new rural master plan including all areas such as infrastructure, socio-economic development, employment, environment, etc. Currently, all the communes in Vietnam have completed the master planning phase. However, the actual

implementation depends on many different factors. Each province selected some of its communes to pilot the implementation of New Rural Development targets. The Provincial People’s Committee (PPC) would then focus more leadership efforts, solutions and resources on these pilot communes and districts in order to achieve the targets. In Ninh Binh, Yen Khanh District was selected to be a priority district, with three pilot communes. Under this decision, Yen Khanh was offered additional resources and support by the province; for example, the Vietnam Bank for Social Policy loans were focused on Yen Khanh District. Similarly, some communes in Yen Khanh District were provided with construction material support to improve and renovate infrastructure such as roads and cultural houses, etc. These have brought about considerable changes to the face of these rural areas and positively influenced community members in terms of renovating their own houses, building latrines, and improving the surrounding environmental sanitation and landscape.

In NRD pilot districts and communes, the provincial leaders often bring aid projects to these areas to create “resonance effects,” helping to speed up the new rural development progress. This is also the reason why the CHOBA project was launched in many communes (16 out of 19 communes) of Yen Khanh District.

2.1.2. Key stakeholders in CHOBA in promoting sanitation at the local level

The key stakeholders in the implementation of CHOBA project are summarized below:

<i>Stakeholders</i>	<i>How they support CHOBA in promoting latrine construction</i>	<i>Effectiveness of their efforts</i>		
		High	Medium	Low
Provincial Project Steering Committee (chaired by Deputy of PPC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct relevant levels and agencies, meetings, consolidation - Advise the PPC on the decision to provide budget support for 12,160 project beneficiary households to build hygienic latrines, each with 2 tons of cement (equivalent to 200,000 VND/household) 	X		
Provincial Women’s Union – the main project partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carry out surveys, mobilize latrine building, check facilities upon completion, disburse rebates - Organize training for communication volunteers (23 classes with 914 participations) and masons (10 classes with 208 participations). - Supervise project activities and conduct monitoring and evaluation - Remind and encourage district and commune 	X		

Stakeholders	How they support CHOBA in promoting latrine construction	Effectiveness of their efforts		
	level Project Management Units			
Provincial Preventive Medicine Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborate in terms of providing updated information from the RWSS-NTP - Collaborate in organizing IEC activities (under VIHEMA's plan and operating channels) in the project areas, such as organizing training sessions on triggering and inviting the WU to participate - Provide some communication brochures to households in the communes 			x
Provincial VBSP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arrange more VBSP funds for the household water and sanitation improvement loans (taken from other sources) - Focus more funds on districts with many CHOBA project communes (Yen Khanh District) 		x	
District-level Project Steering Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct communes to keep up the project progress - Monitoring and evaluation 			x
District-level Women's Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directly manage and monitor project progress in the communes - Check and appraise rebated households - Organize disbursement of rebates to households that build latrines - Support in arranging WSS loans from the revolving fund for CHOBA communes 		x	
Commune Project Management Units (PMU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Project implementation planning - Directly supervise the implementation in the villages - Direct collaboration among the village WU heads, village heads and other departments and mass organizations in the commune to implement the project 	x		
Commune-level	- As standing member of the PMU, directly	x		

Stakeholders	How they support CHOPA in promoting latrine construction	Effectiveness of their efforts		
Women's Unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support the planning of project implementation - Monitor and speed up implementation of the plan - Consolidate data on results; regular reporting - Appraise and take photos of households that build latrines - Coordinate with the district WU to pay rebates to households 			
Communication volunteers (village WU heads)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey and make an "input list" of beneficiary households; update this list annually according to project regulations - Develop communication and mobilization plans - Carry out communication and mobilize households to build latrines through group meetings and household visits - Prepare applications for rebates for households to send to the PMU 	x		
Project-trained masons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build latrines according to technical standards as trained by the project 			x

Depending on their role in the project, stakeholders have different interests in the project implementation. This section provides an analysis of the role and involvement of stakeholders at (i) provincial - district level and (ii) commune - village level.

a. Role and involvement of key stakeholders at provincial – district level

Role of Provincial Women's Union

According to the project design, the Provincial Women's Union plays a key role as a standing member of the Project Steering Committee (PMC) and the Project Management Unit (PMU) as well. The PWU focused on the following key implementation activities:

Preparation activities in the inception phase:

According to the PMU performance report, the role and involvement of the PWU are largely focused on:

- Organizing trainings on the project's targets, contents and regulations with focus on project regulations on beneficiaries, procedures and documentation of award payments. A small part of the training content provides propaganda skills for propaganda workers and project officers at the communal level (914 times propaganda workers).
- Training on latrine building techniques: 10 training courses for 208 building workers
- Guidance on how to collect primary information for defining beneficiary households, how to aggregate survey results and generate the list of beneficiary households.

Project administration and management activities:

- Reviewing and overseeing primary results reported by Provincial/Communal Women's Union.
- Based on the verified number of completed households, the Provincial Women's Union sets up a list of completed households to request disbursement approval.
- Disbursing award packages.
- Preparing progress reports and other reports.

As discussed with the group of project officers within the Provincial Women's Union, it took much time and effort to carry out the survey, to synthesize the information and create the list. *"It took around a half year, from July 2012 to November 2012, to input survey data into database of the software; the official list will not be finalized until after Lunar New Year 2013, or February 2013"*. According to the Provincial Women's Union, the reasons for this issue were that *"the project preparation and implementation steps in the inception phase were not carefully taken; training was not well guided; information was not provided adequately and clearly for propaganda workers; changes in forms led to the survey being taken twice."*

After completing the survey and database, the provincial Project Management Unit mainly focused on training for propaganda and building workers. It took relatively much time and effort for the Project Management Unit to carry out this activity. When the project smoothly comes into operation, the role of the Project Management Unit and the Provincial Women's Union involves overseeing, reviewing, making disbursements, synthesizing results and making progress reports.

At present, the role of the Provincial Women's Union concentrates on project management, disbursement, direction, administration and technical support for communes under the project that have received little attention. Every quarter, the Provincial Women's Union produced an implementation plan; however, the plan only included target assignments for districts/communes under the project. Analysis and timely intervention were not emphasized for communes with slow implementation speed. For these communes, the role of the Provincial Women's Union was limited to supervising, speeding up and reminding. Technical support and specific support methods for weak communes have not been implemented.

“Experience sharing and regular meeting with low speed communes was hardly organized. A preliminary project meeting was held after one year of implementation, for all communes under the project.”

“It will be difficult to carry out an extra specific activity for weak communes due to limited project budget; all administration fees and expenses for project activities have to be extracted from the project outputs. The Project Management Unit manages an operations budget that only covers training and communication. Even sending oversight officers to communes under the project needs to be thoroughly considered. In case expenses cannot be covered, we have to combine with other Provincial Women’s Union activities.”

The project is currently being overseen and evaluated based on its outputs. A project database for output management was created, and has been updated regularly. Outcome oversight (households building latrines under CHOBAs projects) must follow tight regulations; the project outcomes are reviewed and appraised seriously. This is one of the project successes and a factor ensuring the project quality.

Nevertheless, besides output-based follow-up and evaluation, process monitoring is also needed. Technical support must be provided and transferred to the provincial Project Management Unit to equip it with sufficient capability in process monitoring, specific solutions and interventions identified for weaker communes so that equal progress can be promoted across the project site.

An obvious issue is that, currently, volunteers’ mobilization and communication skills are inadequate and uneven (refer to the report below on mobilization methods for building latrines for more information). The lack of propaganda workers’ mobilization skills has negatively influenced the project. This is explicitly shown in poor performing communes, where volunteers do not master mobilization methods, practice skills, or the detailed information on how the project is implemented. This not only negatively impacts project progress but also creates a heavier workload for project officers and project administrators due to frequent mistakes.

Thus, the provincial Women’s Union needs to create more activities aimed at enhancing communication and implementation capabilities for the group of propaganda workers, especially for weak communes. This move may bring about long-term and sustainable benefits not only for project implementation but also for other activities carried out by the Provincial Women’s Union since all propaganda workers are communal presidents of the Women’s Union.

Role of Provincial People’s Committee and the Project Steering Committee

A factor contributing to the primary successes of the CHOBAs project in the province of Ninh Binh is the strong commitment and close direction of the Provincial People’s Committee,

especially the role of the provincial leader as chairman of the Project Steering Committee. The role of the Provincial People's Committee and the Project Steering Committee is expressed in the following activities:

- Providing comprehensive direction to relevant units/agencies in cooperating on project implementation.
- Directing the arrangement of loan sources from the provincial Bank for Social Policies for communes under the project. This is a critical factor for speeding up the project progress in these communes.
- Closely directing and managing activities carried out by the district Project Steering Committee. This is a factor ensuring the inclusion of the district People's Committee in directing all sectors in the whole area to implement the project.
- Advising the Provincial People's Committee on supporting 100 kilograms of cement (equivalent to VND 200,000) for each CHOBA awarded household reflects the province's strong commitment in project implementation as well as its determination to complete the target of sanitary latrine in the area.

Cooperation between the Women's Union at the provincial – district – communal levels of project implementation

At present, the cooperation between the Women's Union at all levels of project implementation is relatively good in terms of its functions, responsibilities and roles as regulated by the project. An advantage for the close cooperation is that Women's Unions are key actors in the project and are also agents belonging to the same vertical system. The district Women's Union plays a major role in directly managing and directing communes to implement the project, in directly appraising and reviewing project outputs, and in synthesizing data and implementation outcomes.

However, the district Women's Union's proactivity in the project implementation is not high enough; it acts more as a "bridge" agent only between the communal level and the district level. As for poor performance communes, improvement of the project implementation requires more proactive participation at the district level. If the project aspires to set out specific intervention methods for pushing progress in weak communes, the Provincial Women's Union has to develop an intervention roadmap and methods. These methods should be based on the specific circumstances of the districts and communes. In this respect, participation and proactivity of, and decentralization to, the district level needs to be promoted, for the Provincial Women's Union cannot "reach" and create direct impact at the communal level. A mechanism, therefore, needs to be created for the district level to actively join the project. Activities that the district level can participate in may include:

- Reviewing current states and criteria of communes under the project that have experienced low progress in order to develop relevant solutions.

- Exercising interventions, supports and coaching for weak communes in the form of regular meetings, direct support for weak communes, increased information provision, volunteer guidance, bringing low price latrine models to poor communes, etc.

The district level should be enhanced in its capability and allocated more financial resources to become more active. A clearer decentralization mechanism needs to be set up, including the use of financial resources for project management and support.

Role of EMW staff at project site

Currently, officers at the project site include “project officer” (PO) and “project assistant” (PA). Given the implementation criteria of the CHOBA project and commune-wide project site, both kinds of officers are highly overloaded in their workloads, especially PAs. The PA plays a great number of roles involving: overseeing, appraising outputs in all communes under the project; participating in the preparation and implementation of almost all project activities at project site; updating monitoring and evaluation data; providing information, guiding implementation, updating document, etc., for officers and volunteers in communes under the project.

Such workloads are too heavy for both PO and PA. It should be noted that the responsibilities of both the PO and especially the PA, excessively focus on “case” solutions at the project site. More project research should be done to enhance communal Project Management Units’ capabilities in task implementation, and to gradually move PO/PA’s responsibilities to more strategically supported activities such as technical support for the provincial/district Women’s Union in making plans and designing relevant interventions to speed up project progress and enhance project quality.

b. Stakeholders at the commune and village level

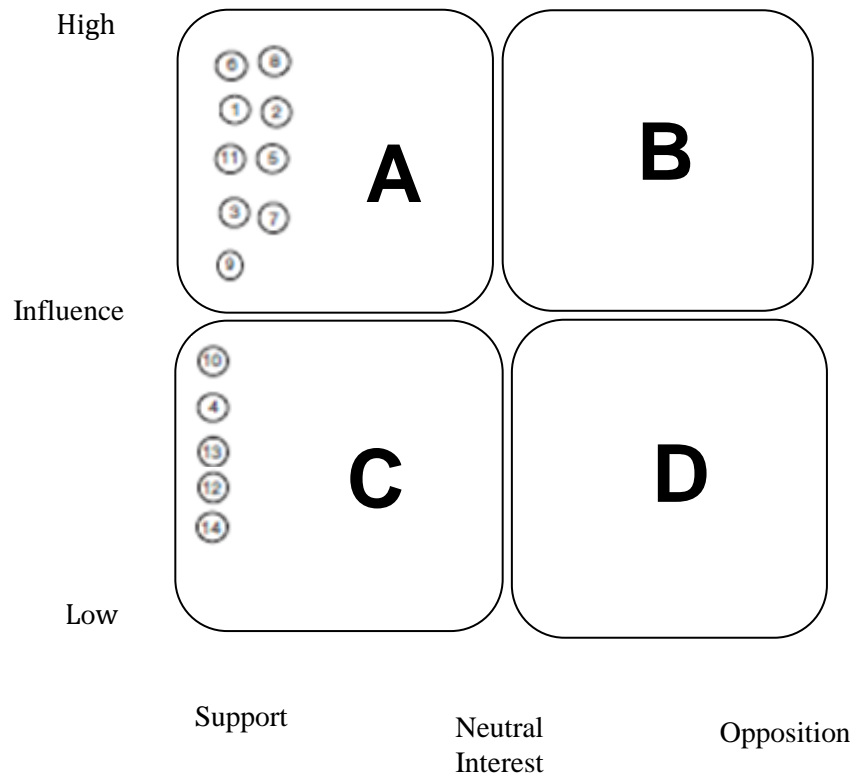
At the commune and village levels, key stakeholders express interest depending to a great extent on the socio-economic development context, local conditions, and the levels at which other relevant programs, such as the NRD program, have been implemented.

For example, Khanh Cu commune (a poor performance project) has achieved the household latrine criterion set by the NRD, which may be the reason commune leaders prioritized other activities rather than increasing hygienic latrine coverage.

By contrast, Yen Khanh district has quite a number of good performance CHOBA communes (both rebated communes are located in this district); part of this success is related to the fact that Yen Khanh was the province’s pilot district in the implementation of the NRD program, which required all of the communes to speed up their progress in achieving the criteria, including the household latrine criterion. In other districts (for example Nho Quan), the NRD activities have not yet been strengthened in their communes, so the commune leaders and PMUs did not consider the increase of latrine coverage one of their

priorities. Without the commune leaders and PMU chairmen’s strong commitment and “political will,” the leadership and efforts to boost project implementation seemed to rely mainly on the roles of the Commune Women’s Unions and the WU’s direction to the volunteers.

The following diagram shows the levels of interest and the roles and influences of the different stakeholders in the project implementation.



- ① Provincial PSC: support and high influence
- ② Provincial WU: support and high influence
- ③ District PSC: Support + influence
- ④ Provincial Preventive medicines center: support +less influence
- ⑤ District WU: strong support + Influence
- ⑥ Provincial Bank of Social Policy: support+ high influence
- ⑦ District bank of Social Policy: support + influence

- ⑧ CPB : support + high influence
- ⑨ Commune WU: support + influence
- ⑩ village head support + less influence
- ⑪ Volunteer: support + high influence
- ⑫ Masons: neutral interest
- ⑬ Construction material supplier: neutral interest
- ⑭ Commune clinic: neutral interest

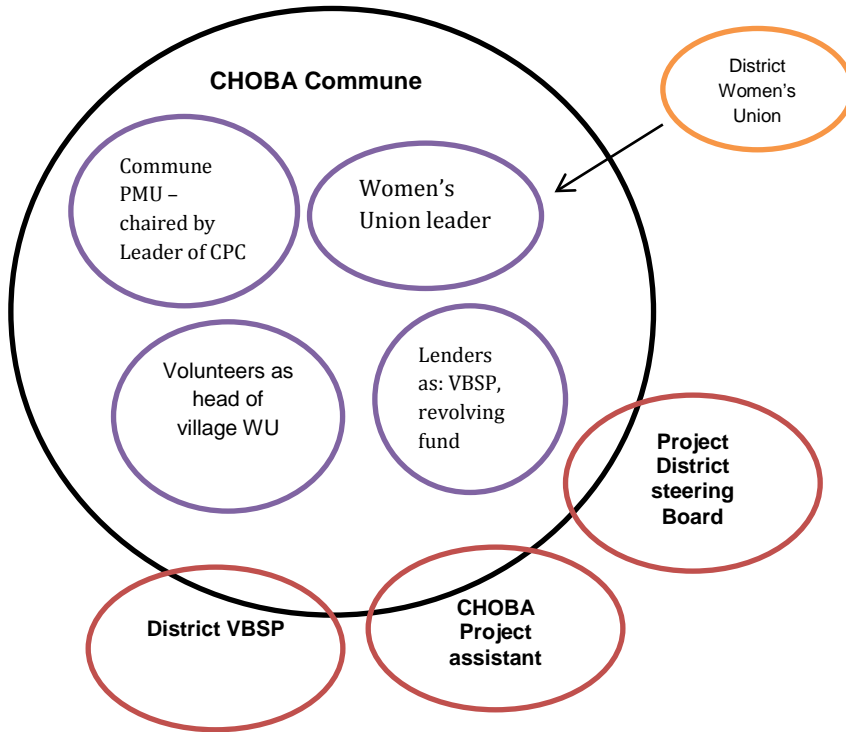
Analysis of the roles and participation of the stakeholders in the project shows that the key actors in the promotion of latrine building include:

Head of Commune PMU: The study results in good performance communes show that the head of the PMU played a critical role. Whether the PMU head exerted close oversight over the project with “specific and strong actions” or not largely affected the project progress. Moreover, if the PMU is headed by the CPC chairman, it creates an advantage in the coordination of the activities of different sectors and mass organizations and the village heads in the commune.

The communication volunteers are the second important contribution to the project’s success. The volunteers’ work experience, enthusiasm and reputation were factors that strongly helped boost the increase in the number of households building latrines. In good performance communes, the volunteers often followed up with their targeted households very closely, knew how to provide financial analysis related to latrine building, how to persuade households and how to help them with financing arrangements. Those volunteers (village WU leaders) who were at the same time leaders of village lending groups (which belong to trust channel of the Women’s Union) had more advantages in their work due to their better reputation and higher “level of influence” in the community.

Head of Commune WU: The role and influence of the Commune WU head, the standing member of the Commune PMU, are reflected in the following activities: planning of project activities, monitoring progress, speeding up villages with slow progress, appraising and taking photos of households that built latrines, checking applications, updating data and reporting. These tasks required the Commune WU leader to have a relatively comprehensive management capacity and work experience and a solid knowledge of the local areas. The WU head needs these capabilities to be able to provide advice and information in a timely manner to the commune leader and PMU head to come up with suitable solutions. In the two poor performance communes, observation and evaluation of the commune WU chairwomen show that these are young officials who have not had enough work experience, have just started participating in the project, and have not spent enough time on the project due to various personal reasons.

Figure 1. Local institutional context - CHOBA Commune



2.2. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD AND WEAK PERFORMANCE COMMUNES

2.2.1 Physical and development features

Feature	Good performance communes	Weak performance communes
Location	Both communes are located in the deeper and more remote areas of the district, away from the central area, as compared to the other communes. Access to these two communes is more limited; Thuong Hoa commune lies in a low-lying area which is prone to flooding.	Located in more favorable locations in terms of access, near the district-level town, near the central area. Khanh Cu commune shares borders with Ninh Binh city. Gia Tuong commune is located near the highway and can be easily reached.
Poverty rate	Relatively high rates of poverty compared to the district's average. Khanh Cong: 10% (2013) Thuong Hoa: (12.9%)	Much lower rates of poverty compared to the district's average. Khanh cu: 4% Gia Tuong: nearly 6%
Hygienic latrine coverage at start of project	Lower coverage compared to the district's average.	Relatively high coverage (Khanh Cu: 50% and Gia Tuong: 26%).
Local livelihoods	Agricultural communes; local people live mainly by rice cultivation (2 crops per year). Many households have members working far from home.	Agricultural communes, with a small service sector. Some people work at industrial parks within the district.
Socio – economic development dynamics	Yen Khanh district is a key district of the province for the implementation of the New Rural Development program (three pilot communes). The province provides quite a lot of resources to the	Khanh Cu commune has met the hygienic latrine criterion as required by the New Rural Development program (80% - including all four types of latrine, according to the MOH's calculation

Feature	Good performance communes	Weak performance communes
	district, including credit from the VBSP. Khanh Cong is one of the communes with high rate of poverty in the district; therefore it is a priority commune to receive credit support from the VBSP for poor and near-poor households.	method)

The following lists summarizes the locations and socio-economic development features of the two weak performance communes:

- Easy access, closer to the central area.
- The poverty rates are not high, in fact are lower than the district's average rate
- The local people have relatively better economic conditions; livelihoods are more diversified; people have more income-earning opportunities from non-agricultural activities.
- Better starting point of sanitation; higher coverage of hygienic latrines as compared to the district's average. A commune has met the criterion of household latrine as required by the NRD program's set of criteria.

2.2.2. Institutional features

Feature	Good performance communes	Weak performance communes
Roles of the head of commune	The chairman of the commune. People's Committee is the head of the PMU.	The vice chairman of the commune. People's Committee is the head of the PMU.
Project Management Unit (PMU)	Directly oversees the project activities. Directs project activities even in regular meetings with village heads and village Party committee secretaries. In Thuong Hoa commune, the commune's head used to be the head of the Women Union chapter, hence can oversee the WU's	The vice chairman's leadership in the role of the PMU's head is not as close as the commune's chairman.

Feature	Good performance communes	Weak performance communes
	activities more closely.	
Roles of the head of commune WU chapter	The head of the WU chapter has extensive experience. (In Khanh Cong, the WU chapter chairwoman was promoted recently, but was the vice chairwoman for many years.) In Thuong Hoa commune: The WU chapter chairwoman has had 5-year experience working in this position.	Both WU chairwomen have less work experience. Have small children.
Roles of commune health staff	Very limited in project performance.	Very limited in project performance.
Roles of head of village WU chapter	In Khanh Cong commune: 100% of the village WU chapter chairwomen are leaders of the VBSP's village lending groups. While being heads of the village WU chapter, they are also Population Committee collaborators. As leaders of VBSP's lending groups, they have a bigger role and higher influence on the WU members in the villages. This is an advantage that can make it easier for them to mobilize households to build latrines.	Except for Khanh Cong commune, in the other communes, only some of the WU chapter chairwomen are leaders of the village VBSP lending groups. Because the loans from the VBSP are limited, they are often distributed evenly among different mass organizations. Therefore, the leader position of the lending group is held by a different mass organization in each village. Other than that, most of the village WU chairwomen are Population Committee collaborators.

2.2.3. Features of rebate household

According to the focus group discussions with the 4 adopter groups in the 4 communes, most of the adopters in at least 3 communes (except 1 commune as Thuong Hoa in Nho quan district) built their latrines at the same time they renovated or built new secondary structures such as kitchens, bathrooms, yards, or connections to the main house (at least 14/18 respondents in these 3 FGDs did it this way. The costs of latrine building and renovation of secondary structures of these households ranged from 15 to 200 million VND). Very few households built a latrine separately at a cost of less than 10 million VND.

In Thuong Hoa commune (Nho Quan): most of the adopter households built latrines separately at relatively low cost, from 5-10 million VND. Quite a large number of households built concrete-ring septic tank latrines.

Economic characteristics of adopter households:

- Poor and near-poor households whose children work and send money home for their parents to build/renovate the house.
- Poor and near-poor households with stable incomes from non-agricultural work.
- Poor households where the husband/wife works far away from home.
- Poor and near-poor households that got loans from the VBSP/ WU's revolving fund/ Agricultural bank.

Characteristics of non-adopters. In all the 4 study communes, the non-adopters are households with the following characteristics:

- Poor households that are single elderly or sick persons.
- Households with chronically seriously ill members.
- Poor households that are single mothers with small children.
- Poor, near-poor and economic hardship households that have to provide for their children's training/studies in vocational school/university/college away from home.

2.2.4. Operational features

This section answers the question: "What are the features of the project's implementation approach, and what are the differences between the good performance communes and weak performance communes?"

The operational features are analyzed in the following dimensions: the leadership of the commune PMU, the volunteers' mobilization approach, and other relevant types of support for CHOBA households in decision-making, financial arrangements and latrine building, and the method of rebate payment.

a. Leadership of the commune CHOBA Project Management Units:

As mentioned in the Institutional Features section, in both of the good performance communes, Khanh Cong and Thuong Hoa, the heads of CHOBA PMU are the commune chairmen. This is an important element that contributed to better oversight of the project progress. In these two communes, besides overseeing and speeding up the project progress through the activities of the commune WU chapter and the volunteer network, the head of the PMU – the commune chairman also encouraged and "assigned tasks and targets" to be implemented to the village heads. This way, the village heads must get involved and follow the implementation progress, as well as mobilize the villagers to achieve the assigned targets. For example, in Khanh Cong commune, adequate project progress (for example, each village must increase its number of latrine by X latrines, etc.) was included in the set of

criteria for the annual performance competition among the villages. With this approach, when implementing the project at the village level, the volunteers received support and collaboration from the village heads, so the mobilization of the villagers became easier and more effective.

“The village head is the closest to the villagers; the commune leaders have to carry out every work through the village heads. We assigned tasks to the village heads so that they could be aware of their village’s latrine target, and implement it together with the WU chapter chairwomen. Once the commune has assigned the task, the village heads and other mass organizations had to get involved, mobilizing their members, hence helped the communicators and WU chapter chairwomen to do their jobs better. We consider CHOPA project an opportunity to meet the latrine criterion of the New Rural Development program; we must pursue it intensively; it would help the commune achieve the NRD criterion, and the villagers would also receive rebates; everyone benefited.” (IDI, head of Khanh Cong commune PMU)

In the case of the other good performance commune, Thuong Hoa commune (Nho Quan district), the head of the PMU – commune chairman directed the project activities at the level of each individual village, and assigned targets of latrine coverage increase to each village, integrated into the village Party committee’s activities. Mobilizing the involvement of the village Party committees is a good approach: the village Party committees mobilized their own members to become good examples of latrine building, which helped speed up the project progress considerably and the village sanitation situation. The PMU head always followed up closely with the project progress every month and quarter. In the last month of each quarter, if any village fell behind its target, the PMU would urge the village Party committee to direct other mass organizations in the village to implement the activities.

In this commune, the PMU head classified the villages into different categories based on the characteristics of each village in terms of latrine building capacity, and then adjusted their directions to suit each village. For example, *“The characteristics of the local residents of different villages in the commune are not the same. For example in Van Trung village, it’s a quite densely-populated village with little production land; many households have members working far away from home, so we focused on mobilization activities in the 3rd or 4th quarter of the year, because during this time, those working far from home often send money back to their families, so many households get extra incomes. For remote villages with more land available, we focused on mobilizing the households to build concrete ring latrines in the 2nd quarter”* (IDI, head of commune PMU).

Therefore, it can be seen that close leadership, attention and follow-up on project progress, together with the search for solutions to speed up the implementation progress--which were adapted to the different economic-residential characteristics of each population

group and each village in the commune--was an important element in the implementation of the project.

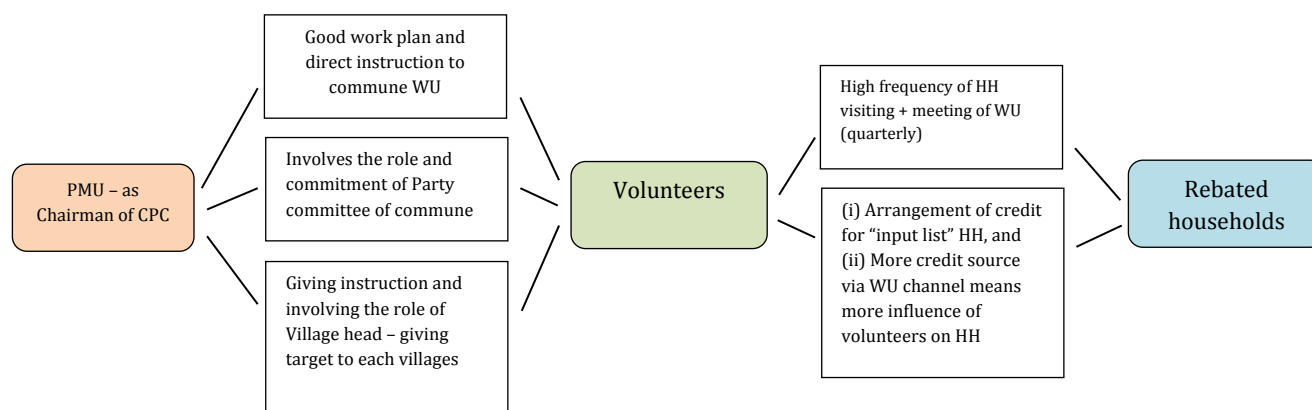
b. Planning and oversight of the implementation of project plans at the commune and village levels

A high-quality plan which adequately takes into consideration all necessary aspects such as targets, implementation solutions, and responsibilities of stakeholders--based on proper analysis of financial capacity of different population groups--is a crucial tool for the commune to boost the implementation process. This activity needs to be improved immediately to ensure the project progress.

According to the project’s implementation manual, project activities at the commune level include 8 activities, including the very important step 4: “Analysis of financial capacity of households and development of a financial plan.” This step requires screening and categorizing households into 3 groups, based on the household’s financial capacity, including (i) households capable of self-financing, (ii) households capable of paying off loans over time, and (iii) households incapable of any financial contribution. Separate solutions for these 3 household groups are a key to speeding up the project progress.

However, this fourth step – financial capacity analysis – has not been properly carried out at the commune level, especially in communes with poor performance. In these poor performance communes, this activity was considered a responsibility of the village promoters. At the commune level, the development of a “master plan” for the project--which includes details about the classification of households into groups based on financial capacity and solutions for supporting, supervising, monitoring and evaluating such a plan--has not been carried out by the commune PMU. Currently, the commune-level project implementation plan only summarizes information about targets of latrine building assigned to the villages and their deadlines.

Figure 2. Organizational linkage in communes with good project performance



Implications for project: Improving the quality of planning and capacity of monitoring and evaluation of plan implementation at the commune level is highly necessary, to provide the commune PMUs with foundations to oversee the implementation at the village level.

c. Village-level project implementation plan

According to the project implementation manual, the communicators have 4 main responsibilities (which in turn comprise various specific tasks), including planning for project implementation at the village level (task 2.2 under “Responsibilities of Communicators” section), in which specific requirements of communicators are mentioned such as communication activities, planning for resource mobilization, monitoring, and appraisal of latrines, etc. It is necessary to review and reconsider the capacity of carrying out this task as required by the project in regards to the following aspects:

- **Planning capacity:** The discussions with communicator groups show that this is a relatively difficult task, given the existing capacity of the communicators (heads of WU chapters). They have not officially received instructions or guidance through a training program or requirements about the plan and progress report formats from the village level. Although the communicators have been trained by the project, the training contents only focused on the survey and classification of households, or communication skills, and implementation procedures (checking upon construction, monitoring etc.). The volunteers have not had access to instructions for planning and where they should send their plans for the purpose of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of plans, etc. Therefore, how they tackle the 4 assigned tasks depended completely on the individual capacity and work experience of each volunteer.
- **Planning as a requirement:** Although the project requires the volunteers to do the planning as an official task, it didn’t “institutionalize” this activity. There were no requirements or supervision over whether the volunteers developed a plan or not, who they should send the plan to, or the quality of the plan and how it should be implemented.
- **Support for plan development/implementation method:** No or very little support of this kind was found in the study communes. In the two poor performance communes, when asked about the current progress of project implementation in their villages, many of the volunteers did not have good knowledge about the different household groups categorized by financial capacity, or did not know how the latrine building was being done, and did not have any plan for when to focus on which household group.

d. Meetings and knowledge exchange and discussion among villages about the project implementation progress

The volunteers, as village WU heads, often organized regular monthly meetings, as part of the activities of the commune WU chapter. The monthly meeting with the village WU heads serves multiple purposes, such as: reporting on the activities of the WU chapters, reporting on upcoming activities of the WU, and summarizing the monthly interest collection progress of the lending groups. CHOPA project progress was one of the many topics of these regular meetings. However, there has been no separate meeting of the volunteers specifically for the purpose of knowledge exchange and discussion about CHOPA project implementation. Since the beginning of the project, the commune PMU has only organized one meeting with the volunteers, as a preliminary year-end meeting about project implementation results. This, to some extent, placed limitations on the project progress; good performance villages were not officially praised, and poor performance villages did not receive experience sharing from other villages. Also, due to this lack of official meetings regarding project activities, many volunteers were not well informed of new updates from the project (for example about the replacement of households in the input list, etc.).

Implications for project: It is necessary to develop and implement an official “regulation” of the project, which provides for the planning activity, monitoring and implementation of plans from the village to the commune levels, and technical support and capacity building support for the volunteers so that they can carry out this activity properly. Moreover, provisions for the organization of quarterly meetings between the PMU and the volunteers are also very necessary; these meetings will serve as a two-way information channel for the commune leaders to grasp the progress of the villages, as well as to supervise, encourage, and help the volunteers tackle any difficulties encountered.

e. Organizing to pay household rebates at the commune

Organizing to disburse rebates was one of the 8 steps of the project activities at the commune level. The form the rebate took did have some influence on the psychology of those who were rewarded and those who were not. In Khanh Cong commune, the giving of rebates was organized as a “formal event” of the project. The beneficiary households were invited to the commune center to attend this “ceremony” which was “formal and official.” At the ceremony, the head of the PMU would give a speech in front of the households about the meanings of the incentive packages, as well as the project’s activities. This is a very good channel for communication, and for presenting project messages. This created significant influences on those “not rewarded,” encouraging them to follow the example of those who were “rewarded.” As explained by the PMU manager, the common mindset of rural people is “*a dollar of wage is worth less than a cent of reward.*” The project should continue and replicate this practice in other communes.

f. Performance of volunteers

It was obvious that the project implementation progress depended partly on the volunteers' mobilization and communication activities with the households. In good performance communes, in addition to the abundance of WASH loans, the volunteers were quite enthusiastic and devoted to the project. For example, in Khanh Cong commune, all of the volunteers are leaders of the village VBSP lending groups. The majority of the members of the VBSP lending groups are poor, near-poor and economic hardship households; therefore, the volunteers often go to these households to collect interest (twice a month). This allows them to have more time to communicate and mobilize the households. More importantly, when leaders of lending groups are volunteers, they have a higher level of influence on the group members as well as in the community; therefore, they had an advantage in the mobilization and communication activities.

The group discussions with the volunteers also showed that those volunteers who were not leaders of the VBSP lending groups (in 3 study communes, except Khanh Cong) had a more limited grasp of the actual situation and conditions of the households, and lower performance in terms of latrine building mobilization.

g. Mobilization approaches of volunteers:

The volunteers adopted different "strategies" towards different household groups, depending on the household's situation and financial resources.

As discussed in the previous section, most of the volunteers used the method of "*sniping*," targeting individual households. In good performance communes (Khanh Cong or Thuong Hoa), the volunteers knew how to screen the target households, and applied different mobilization "strategies" at different times. Well-performing volunteers, who got a high number of rebated households, are those who had a good grasp of the situation of each household on their "list" and had different ways of mobilizing different target households. For example, "to households of poor elderly people whose children work far away from them, I mobilized both the household owners and their children; whenever the children came back to visit their parents, I would go to see them and mobilize them and talk to them, so that they would save money for their parents to build latrines... To households that earn their income from sales of livestock or crop products, we mobilized them to build latrines right away, or mobilized them to borrow money from their relatives or family to build latrines. As for those who could pay back loans, we arranged to help them borrow from the VBSP... We even used the following method of mobilization: we gathered information about households who were about to receive money from a "ho" scheme (a form of unofficial revolving common fund plan). We went to mobilize them so that when they got the "ho" money, often around 10-15 million VND, they would build latrines or renovate their secondary structures.

Group meetings of households on the "list of beneficiaries" were also an effective tool in some villages of the good performance communes. In Khanh Cong, some volunteers came

up with the initiative of organizing the group meeting at the house of a recently rebated household. This motivated other households without latrines when they saw the clean and hygienic latrine of the newly-rebated household.

The financial analysis capacity--helping households calculate expenses required for latrine building or renovation of a secondary structure associated with the latrine--is something to take into consideration. If a volunteer had a good knowledge of the costs and could help the households analyze their ability to cover the costs--purchasing materials or hiring masons on credit--the households would find it easier to make the decision to build latrines.

“During our mobilization visits, we had to find out about the financial capacity of the households, for example how much money they could manage, and with their financial capacity, how they should build their latrine, where to buy materials, which expenses to pay immediately, and which expenses they could pay later; for example, for households with too tight budget, we told them to hire project masons, and we would intervene so that they could pay the mason later, little by little. In general we had to apply many methods, and did the calculations together with the households, so that they were confident to make the decision.” (FGD communicators, Thuong Hoa commune)

In poor performance communes, it was obvious that the volunteers did not have a clear strategy about how to mobilize different target groups. It seems that in these communes, the volunteers also went to households to mobilize them, but only provided a general introduction about the project, and then left the households to build latrines on their own. For household who did build latrines, the volunteers would prepare applications for these households for the rebates. They did not have a “getting involved” or “working side by side” attitude toward the households during the latrine building process. For example, right in Thuong Hoa commune, in good performance villages, the volunteers reported “last month, 2 households built latrines, and we’re now preparing the applications for them to receive the rebates.” But when asked which type of latrine these two households built, how they built it and at what cost, the volunteers did not have any information.

In the two poor performance communes, Khanh Cu and Gia Tuong, the main tasks that the volunteers carried out seemed to be focused on preparing applications for rebates for those on the list of households that had built latrines, rather than mobilizing the households to build latrines. Most of the rebated household in these two communes, especially Gia Tuong, built their latrines at the same time they built or renovated their houses, or built/renovated their secondary structures including kitchen, latrine, yard, and animal pens, etc. Therefore, the latrine building of these households is not a meaningful outcome of the volunteer’s “mobilization.”

Also in poor performance communes or villages, the volunteers did not have enough knowledge to provide financial analysis and advice on the costs and affordability for the

households. The focus group discussions with non-adopters showed that they did not have adequate information about the costs of the latrines. These households said that they did not yet have the “economic conditions to do it,” but when asked what they meant by “economic conditions,” and how much money would be enough for them to build a latrine, these villagers were very vague about how much a latrine cost.

Implication for project: It is necessary to provide instructions to the villagers, strengthen their skills, and use cost analysis tools, including material costs and mason costs. The project needs to provide detailed information (in written form) about materials requirements (list of materials), and based on this list, the volunteers would check the market price in the commune, in order to provide advice to the households. This would help households better understand and manager their financial capacity.

2.3. MOTIVATIONS FOR LATRINE BUILDING

Result of focus groups with HH including those with or without septic latrine show that all households have good awareness on improving sanitation and the benefits of a hygienic latrine.

In the 4 CHOBA communes, the factors found to be more important in increasing the demand for latrines include:

- Increasing the awareness of the community on improved sanitation as a means for better quality of life
- The role of the local authority
- The intensity of volunteer mobilization

Focus groups emphasized that economic prosperity contributed significantly to increased awareness. As a result of economic development, local people have traveled more widely and and have been exposed to more knowledge about sanitation practices and behavior. Having a latrine is increasingly recognized as a means to improve cleanliness and comfort in ones daily life.

In addition to improved awareness, HH also consider reputation with neighbors and guests as an important factor that influences the decision to build a latrine. People believe that they will get more respect from their neighbors and visitors if they have good latrine.

In good performance communes, the role of the local authority and the availability reasonably priced latrines contributed greatly to demand for sanitation. For rural farmers, “hearing should be in combination with seeing – if they see many HH built latrine at the cost of 6 or 7 millions dong, which is reasonable price for them, they believe that they will be able to buy a latrine.” This is one of the skey factor creating demand for latrines.

For project performance, the “seeing is believing” factor has both positive and negative influence. In those communes where a low-cost latrine (like the septic latrine with concrete rings) is promoted, coverage of latrines gets increasingly expanded.

According to interviews with the commune PMUs, the local people tend to “copy the others.” In good performance communes, if they successfully mobilized some poor, near-poor and economic hardship households to build low-cost latrines early on—with the genuine aim of “improved sanitation”—other households would “follow the trend.” That was the case in Thuong Hoa commune, where most of the households built latrines solely for the purpose of “improved sanitation.” Most of the households built latrines separately, not in association with other household structures, using concrete ring technology. Therefore, the cost of the latrine was quite low, around 5-7 million VND; some households spent less than 5 million VND. At this cost, many near-poor and economic hardship households could manage, so the latrine coverage has increased at a high rate, highest in all the 6 project communes in the district. This increase occurred despite the fact that this is a low-lying commune, which is – as the district Steering Committee explained – often prone to flooding and thus more difficult to mobilize because households would need to spend more money for a more solid understructure.

The same “copy the others” mindset was, by contrast, a hindrance to the latrine coverage increase rate in a number of other communes. Specifically, in Gia Tuong, a poor performance commune, most of the households that received rebates from the CHOBA project built their latrines in association with other purposes, “renovating the main house or secondary structures.” Therefore, the costs for these households were quite high, ranging from 25-30 million VND to 200 million VND. These households are on the list of poor, near poor or economic hardship households for various reasons; they were ranked as “low-income,” possibly because they did not have a *regular* source of income. But in fact, they have financial capacity, and depend on irregular income sources (for example, money from their children, or seasonal jobs, etc.). Other genuinely poor or economic hardship households, when seeing these rebated households build latrines at such high costs, thought that this amount far exceeded their affordability and thus did not dare think about building a latrine.

Table 1: Number of rebated households and cost of latrine building

Commune	Total number of HHs that received rebates			Number of HHs who obtained loans from the VBSP or revolving fund	Average cost (mil VND)
	Total number of HHs that received the rebate	Including: poor + near poor HHs	Economic hardship HHs		
Khanh Cong	274	136	138	157	9.693
Khanh Cu	91	32	59	11	11,000
Gia Tuong	49	15	34	26	8.758
Thuong Hoa	178	76	102	38	8.561

Source: CHOPA project M&E data

What are the constraints on the demand for a household latrine?

Lack of financial resources:

Lack of resources was mentioned as the major factor that hindered HH from having septic latrine. The poor and near poor HH reported being unable to save or access sufficient financial resources to pay the cost of a latrine. As reported from project M&E data, the average cost of a latrine is 8,561,000 dong, equivalent to twenty months of income for a poor HH or ten months of income for a HH with economic hardship. Because poor households are almost those with elderly, disabled or chronically ill people, almost all of these HH have limited potential for stable income generation.¹ Poor and near poor HHs find it very hard to be able to access cash income through earning or saving for a septic latrine.

Preference for modern, expensive latrines:

Household group discussion reveals that almost all households desire a septic latrine which is built solidly, and attached to a bathroom and other equipment such as a cistern and modern bathroom equipment. Many households built a bathroom and latrine in combination with other subprojects such as a yard, cistern, or a lean-to connecting the main house to a back house. This created a cost burden for the households, up to VND 50 million in some cases. The psychology of “solidity,” “comfort is better than pride,” and

¹ According to statistical data on the poverty rate of Nho Quan district (2014), around 80% of poor HH have elderly or chronically ill individuals.

waiting for “doing it all at the same time” is relatively popular in the rural North of Vietnam, not only in Ninh Binh but also in many other provinces.

Implication for project:

The project targets poor, near poor and households with economic hardship, so it should quickly introduce low-cost latrine types that are affordable to poor and economic hardship households. The “introduction” here should not be limited to the provision of information about the technology, price, communication and mobilization, but should also include practical support solutions that are adapted to local characteristics, so that the project’s target households can “see with their own eyes” and follow the example. Supporting arrangements may include: (i) arranging loans for households; (ii) designing opportunities to purchase materials with delayed payment, or mobilizing masons to allow late payment from households, (iii) introducing a low-cost latrine (for example septic latrine using ready-made concrete rings), in combination with counseling that this technology can provide as durable and high-quality a septic latrine as tanks with bricks. At the moment, this technology has not been well promoted in the communes visited (except Thuong Hoa).

2.4. TARGETING PROCESS

This section answers the question: “How was household data collected and the “input list” created? Who participated in the different steps in the process and how did they perform?”

The project beneficiaries include poor, near-poor and economic hardship (economic hardship) households. Poor and near-poor households were identified from the official CPC-confirmed list, based on the results of the annual poor and near-poor household survey according to the poverty line set by the MOLISA. Economic hardship households were identified based on 2 criteria: (i) income per capita from 521,000 VND to under 800,000 VND (equivalent to 200% of the poverty line); and (ii) voted for in the village’s public selection meeting. The number of economic hardship households must not exceed 20% of the total number of households in the commune.

With the OBA approach, the development of an input database, known as the “input household list,” with accurate information, is highly important because it serves as the basis for payment of rebates to households. However, for various reasons, the collection of baseline survey data was conducted with many errors and mistakes, making it difficult to verify and correct figures, resulting in significant delays to the project progress.

The main barriers to the initial information collection may include:

- Volunteers did not understand clearly the goals and meaning of the information collection.

- Volunteers were not trained in and did not have a good understanding about hygienic latrine technical specifications and standards, resulting in errors and mistakes during the survey process.
- Requiring a survey of all households in the commune increased the workload and time constraints, causing many mistakes, especially in the data entry step.

The identification of economic hardship households with a “quota” of 20% of the total number of households in the commune was quite a complicated process for the volunteers. The volunteers did work with the village heads and village party committees to develop this list; however, they encountered numerous difficulties in accurately identifying households with incomes between 521,000 VND and 800,000 VND. The list built was rarely based on the income criterion because the calculation of income of each and every household was time-consuming. Instead, in most cases, the selection of these households was based on subjective judgment on the economic conditions, livelihoods and family background of the households in the communes. The “public” vote in the village meeting did not seem to be carried out in all the villages. The group discussions with volunteers in at least 3 of the study communes (Khanh Cu, Gia Tuong and Thuong Hoa) confirm that “we did carry out the vote for households on the list openly with the village head, village party secretary and key mass organizations in the village,” which means that not all households in the village were informed and involved in the selection process. The “missing out” and “overlapping” of beneficiaries might have occurred during this process, especially at the beginning of the project implementation when the communication and volunteer training activities were not well organized and the monitoring of survey and information collection was not properly executed.

The scaling up of the project in other communes needs to be considered and lessons need to be learnt; adequate training and information should be provided right from the start of the household survey and information collection to avoid wasting time in reviewing, verifying and adjusting input data.

Expansion of CHOBA beneficiary list (input list)

At present, the input list has covered up to 40% of all the households in the project communes. The provincial and district-level Project Steering Committees and volunteers in all of the study communes all suggested that the project expand the input list to cover 25% of the total number of households in the communes. This is not necessarily a good solution and may risk including “not really hardship” households in the beneficiary list, especially in better-off communes with low poverty rates and high latrine coverage at the start of the project. For example, in Khanh Cu commune, the number of potential CHOBA households was 557 households, making up 65% of the total number of households without latrines in the commune (similar proportions were found in other communes that had achieved 45-50% latrine coverage before the CHOBA project started).

However, the project can consider expanding the beneficiary lists in communes with poorer economic prospect, more economic hardship conditions and lower initial latrine coverage. The quota for households with economic hardship is 20% of households for every commune. But the economic development and wealth status varies widely across communes. Poorer communes often have lower latrine coverage. So the wealth status of the 20% of households that are considered as “economic hardship” in richer communes would be very different from in the poorer communes. For poorer communes, expansion of the households with economic hardship as project beneficiaries should be considered.

However, the expansion of the beneficiary list needs further consideration and research, and the project implementation performance should be a criterion for consideration. For example, expansion of the beneficiary list could be considered when a commune has performed well and achieved a certain benchmark of latrine increase.

2.5. HOW EFFECTIVE ARE IEC ACTIVITIES

This section answers the questions: “*How effective are CHOBA Information – Education – Communication activities in terms of reaching the objectives and results set?*”

IEC strategy

According to the project’s strategy, the project IEC activities were carried out through 2 main channels, which are **(i) group meetings and (ii) household visits**. Group meetings of the project participants by residential cluster were one of the project’s requirements, for the purpose of implementing participatory IEC activities at the community. However, the survey results show that this activity was rarely carried out in the study communes. The main communication channel through which the CHOBA project reached its main target audience was the volunteers making household visits. Household visits are also considered an effective communication approach. However, the effectiveness of this approach depends heavily on the capacity and time spent on visits, and the level of dedication of the volunteers themselves.

In the two good performance communes (Khanh Cong and Thuong Hoa), most of the volunteers have a good knowledge of the project’s approach, procedures and requirements. In addition, they also have a relatively good grasp of information about CHOBA households. This was achieved thanks to the following factors:

- **Regular visits to and mobilization of potential households.** In Khanh Cong commune and a number of villages in the other commune, the volunteers were heads of the village WU chapters and leaders of the lending groups at the same time, so they often combined the latrine promotion content into their interest-collecting visits to customers (twice a month).
- **Standing in the community.** As long-time village WU chairwomen and leaders of the lending groups, the volunteers have good reputations and quite a high

degree of influence on the villagers/women in the community. This brings advantages to their latrine promotion work.

- **Mobilization capacity and personal capacity of each volunteer.** This capacity is relatively equal among the volunteers in Khanh Cong commune. In other communes, the volunteers' capacity differs to a greater extent, in terms of mobilization and communication capacity, as well as knowledge about the project approach, procedures and regulations.

It is noteworthy that the information about the project approach, regulation, rebate amount, etc., seems to be communicated to CHOBA target audiences through only one single channel – the volunteers. ***Accurate information about the project in the 2 poor performance communes was not adequate and was relatively vague.***

The households in the project communes who were considered potential CHOBA households did not have much key information about the project either:

“I don't know how much the rebate amount is; I only know that when [the latrine] is done, I'll invite the WU officer to come here and take pictures, and then I will receive a rebate...”

“I don't know who gets rebated; I only know that if an officer comes to take pictures of the latrine, we will get a rebate. Anyhow... we'll be grateful for any amount of rebate...”

“About who gets the rebate, the village WU chairwoman will come and inform us. We don't know who is eligible. To be selected, a household must be poor, near-poor or economic hardship, but we don't know specifically which households.” (FGDs with non adopters in 4 communes)

Volunteers' communication/mobilization methods: The discussions with the volunteer groups as well as households show that the main method volunteers used to communicate information about the project was “informal” mobilization to individual households. The volunteers also tended to select households with a higher likelihood of building latrines to mobilize, such as households whose children work far from home, or whose children are well-off, households with stable income sources, or households eligible for VBSP loans or other sources of credit.

And so, households that are considered “impossible to afford a latrine” rarely received attention or mobilization from the volunteers. These households include: too poor households, single and elderly persons who are not taken care of by their children, households with seriously sick members, households ineligible for bank loans for latrine building, etc. “As to households that are too poor, we know that even if we mobilized them, they wouldn't have enough money to build a latrine; these households

also rarely attend meetings; they are not eligible for benefits such as loans...” (FGD, volunteers, Gia Tuong commune)

Communication through group meetings of project participants:

All the volunteers said that they organized group meetings of households participating in the project to disseminate information about the project. However, these group meetings might not be adequately implemented in all the villages or residential clusters. The most common method was the inclusion of CHOPA project contents into village meetings or WU meetings which are organized once every 3 months. If this content was integrated into the village meetings, the time allocated to the volunteers’ presentation was only 10-15 minutes at the end of each meeting. With this method, the project information might not be adequately and accurately communicated to the target audience.

IEC materials:

In all 4 study communes, we did not find any materials, pictures or posters that show the visibility of the project in the commune. At the commune WU chapter’s office, there was a board on which there were many pictures of the commune WU’s activities; however there was no picture of the project activities.

Hand-outs: According to the volunteers and household respondents, the target households all received latrine introductory brochures, and “reminder series” brochures. However, according to the project officers and WU staff, the information contents of the “reminder series” were not really appropriate and effective in boosting the decisions of building latrines.

The project’s flip chart: The flip chart was designed and produced as a tool for the volunteers to use in communication activities/events such as group meetings. Although the volunteers said that they had been using this flip chart, when asked in more detail about the information, content, effectiveness and process of using the flip chart, most of the volunteers did not have any real answer. The group discussions with the villagers show that this tool was rarely used.

Reasons why the flip chart was rarely used:

- Groups meetings were rarely organized, so there was no opportunity to introduce the flip chart.
- The volunteers did not have enough skills and confidence, and did not have public speaking skills to introduce the IEC contents.

Communication through the commune’s loudspeaker system: This is a good communication channel; however, the question is what information to broadcast? The

preparation of information content to be broadcast was carried out by the commune. There has been no documentation of this content.

2.6. ROLE OF CREDIT

In the project communes, the following official sources of credit are available for WASH improvement:

- Vietnam Bank for Social Policy (WASH credit).
- Revolving fund to promote building of WASH facilities, supported by the World Bank and entrusted to the Women's Union (in short, WASH revolving fund).

As a member of the Project Steering Committee, the VBSP of Ninh Binh has coordinated well with the provincial WU chapter through the allocation and arrangement of larger funding to the CHOBA project districts and communes. However, the Bank also has to balance its funds to ensure meeting other priority targets for the province, for example funding for the National Target Program on New Rural Development.

A number of priorities to ensure further funding for WASH activities in the project communes include:

- Distribute and transfer spare funds from other programs to serve WASH targets. For example, part of the fund of the economic development loans for poor households has been transferred to the WASH fund.
- Prioritize project districts in distribution of WASH budget; Yen Khanh district is an example. The province's total amount of WASH loans for 2014 is 15 billion VND, of which 4 billion VND has been allocated to Yen Khanh district, which makes up 15% of the total budget of the province for this program.

In addition, the WASH revolving fund supported by the World Bank via the WU has also arranged to focus on funding for 19 CHOBA communes.

Although the provincial Project Steering Committee has exerted a lot of efforts in mobilizing funding for WASH loans for CHOBA households, the funding has not met the needs of the community. WASH loans from the VBSP in the last 2 years have been focused on Yen Khanh district, with 16 CHOBA project communes. For example, in Khanh Cong commune, the amount of VBSP's WASH loans allocated for the commune in year 2013 was 700 million VND. In addition, the commune also gets about 500 million VND from the Provincial WU for the revolving funds. The total number of households that have had access to WASH loans has reached 600 households in the whole commune. This has been a significant contribution to the fast progress of project implementation in Khanh Cong commune.

In Khanh Cu commune of Yen Khanh district and 2 other communes of Nho Quan district, WASH loans are not as largely available as in Khanh Cong commune. Specifically, in these 3 communes, thanks to the CHOBA project, each commune is allocated 500 million VND/year from the provincial WU for loans. Other than that, funding from the VBSP for WASH loans is quite limited, at approximately 100 million VND in 2013. This has placed some limitations on the project implementation progress because the households faced difficulties in accessing funding sources to build latrines.

Of the two sources of loans, the households preferred borrowing from the VBSP because they would not have to pay back the principal until 5 years later. The provincial WU's loans require monthly payment of interest and principal (equivalent to around 140,000 VND/month), and this makes it difficult for poor and economic hardship households who cannot arrange enough cash for the monthly payment.

The focus group discussions with the households show that to poor, near-poor and disadvantaged households, access to loans played an important role in the decision and process of latrine building. Through various communication and mobilization channels, the households understood the importance and usefulness of a hygienic latrine; however, many households found it very difficult to arrange 5-10 million VND all at once. If they could take a loan of up to 5-6 million VND, these households would be able to borrow money from other people or sell animal or crop products to get enough money to build their latrines.

At least in 2 FGDs with non-adopters, when asked “if you could choose one out of the following 2 forms of support: CHOBA rebate and VBSP loan, which would you prefer?”, many responded, “We would prefer the loan, because if we could borrow 5-7 million VND within 5 years, we would be able to build a latrine and we would be able to pay back the loan; as for the 560,000 VND rebate, for us that’s a lot, but it’s nothing compared to the amount that we would have to spend all at once.”

Therefore, it can be seen that credit for poor, near-poor and economic hardship households is one of the important elements which has strongly influenced the project implementation. The communes which received priority funding from the VBSP have had much better performance in the project than the other communes.

2.7. ROLE OF REBATES

This section considers the extent to which rebate schemes are effective at motivating project actors.

Household rebate scheme

The rebate package, including the 560,000 VND/household rebate, was a feature that separates CHOBA from other approaches. In the case of Ninh Binh province, in the project sites, a significant proportion of rebated households invested from more than 10 million VND to several tens of millions of VND (as observed in discussions with rebated households), and thus the rebate was small compared to the household's investment (estimated 4-5%). Ninh Binh PPC has supported this approach and provided each CHOBA household with 2 tons of cement as additional support for latrine building, equivalent to 200,000vnd/HH. Although this additional support from the PPC increased the rebate to 760,000 VND/HH, this rebate package is still a modest contribution to the household's cost of latrine building.

Even though this rebate was “hardly anything” compared to the latrine cost, it still has an important impact on the households. Focus group discussions with rebated households show that the rebate was still an important factor that made them decide to build latrines. A number of reasons “why it was important” cited in the discussions include:

“With this rebate, at least it was enough for my family to buy a toilet pan.” (FGD with rebated HHs)

“The rebate was enough to pay part of the mason's cost; as for the rest, we'll save money and pay it off after a few months.” (FGD with rebated HHs)

“A dollar of wage is worth less than a cent of reward. Those who built latrines before the project did not get the rebate; they questioned a lot. Many HHs haven't built latrines; they try to save and plan to build latrines so that they will get a rebate.” (FGD with volunteers)

To poor households, this rebate was truly a meaningful financial contribution. In the case of Thuong Hoa commune (Nho Quan district), where most of the households built latrines separately (not at the same time with kitchen and other secondary renovations), the cost of a latrine was quite low; the majority of the rebated households built latrines at 5-8 million VND. As a proportion of the total cost, the 760,000 VND rebate was a significant financial aid to them (it covers 7-10% of the cost). Poor and seriously economic hardship households have learnt how to calculate the expenses and consider the affordability of each expense.

“We just need to manage ourselves or borrow from somewhere else to get an amount of around 3 million dong, or even only 2 million dong, it's already enough to build a latrine. We can buy concrete rings on credit, at a cost of around 900,000 VND, and then pay it back when we receive the rebate. As for the cost for masons, part of it can also be paid later because the masons are from the village. We just need to pay for the sanitary ware, pipes and the latrine wall and roof immediately.” (FGD with rebated HHs in Thuong Hoa commune)

Although the rebate package was highly appreciated by the rebated households, the story is not quite the same for other CHOBA households that have not built a latrine. In Khanh Cu and Gia Tuong communes (poor performance communes), when CHOBA non-adopters were asked, “If you could choose between 2 options: a loan or a rebate, which would you prefer?”, most of the respondents chose the loan option to build a latrine.

“We’re all aware of the benefits of a hygienic latrine; we really like to build one, but we haven’t got enough money available to do it; if the Government supports us, please give us loans; we really wish we could [build a latrine]. The 760,000 VND rebate is a lot, but we don’t know where we can get the money to build [a latrine].”

“A septic tank latrine now costs more than 10 million VND; the rebate is only 760,000 VND, we don’t know where we could get the rest of the money. It would be best if we could borrow from the VBSP or the Women’s Union.”

From the findings above, it can be seen that the rebate scheme and the credit scheme for poor and near poor households have different roles and meanings depending on the local context of each area; the rebate scheme can create a big impact in motivating households to build latrines, but not in every case.

Another aspect of the rebate approach to latrine promotion that needs to be further studied and revisited is that most of the rebated households in the category of “economic hardship households” (the 20% group) built their latrines at the same time they renovated other household structures, at a relatively high cost (20-30 million VND on average in Khanh Cong and Khanh Cu, and over 50 million VND in Gia Tuong commune). In such cases, the rebate scheme did not make much difference. The implication here is that the project needs to carry out further studies to come up with a more suitable beneficiary targeting approach.

Rebate package for communes achieving a hygienic latrine coverage rate of over 30%:

Regarding the change from the 90 million VND fixed package to a package of fixed 65 million VND + 50,000 VND/latrine built for the commune PMU: All respondents affirmed that this change was appropriate because it directly encouraged and motivated the PMU members to better implement the project. The rebate of 50,000 VND/latrine built was used as transportation support and per point for the PMU members in their activities and monitoring visits to households.

The roles of the rebate package for communes in enhancing motivation and effectiveness of project implementation:

In Ninh Binh, two communes have received the 64 million VND rebate package. The rebate amounts have entered the provincial WU’s bank account. Both communes have completed their applications and sent their spending plans to the Project Steering Committee.

However, at the time of the study, both communes have not received the rebate amounts. According to the plan, the rebate amount will be “disbursed” in a number of phases, depending on the commune’s spending plan, and will be approved by the Steering Committee. This could delay the transfer of rebate amounts to the communes.

According to the project policy, the rebate amount “is spent for public activities and facilities that serve improving the community’s environmental sanitation.”

Currently, according to its rebate spending plan, Khanh Cong commune intends to spend the money on expenses such as: partly funding the construction of the latrine in the CPC building; purchasing computers for the commune WU; organizing some IEC activities, etc. These expenditures seem to be focused more on the commune level, while at the village level, the village volunteers – those who directly created success for the commune – have not received much attention. The project should consider more specific regulations on the rebate spending for the village-level “community,” for example building a latrine for the cultural house, using part of the rebate amount to reward good performance villages/volunteers, etc. That way the rebate would create more encouragement effects.

3. Conclusions

The most important actors in the project implementation include:

Commune Project Management Unit: The “political” commitment of the PMU chief plays an important role, and in the case of the two study communes, contributed significantly to the project’s success. This commitment was reflected in specific activities such as: close follow-up with project progress in each village; developing an implementation plan based on information about the actual situation, economic conditions and affordability of households in each village; spending time on the project; directing different sectors and mass organizations in the village and village heads to coordinate; assigning annual and quarterly targets to the villages.

Commune Women’s Union: The management and organization capacity of the commune WU’s chairwoman has a significant role in the project, which is demonstrated by the timely supply of information to volunteers, support for volunteers in approaching the beneficiaries, implementation of communication activities, and preparation and completion of applications and project procedures. Monitoring and speeding up the progress of each village was an element that helped the volunteers become more connected to and more responsible in their work.

Volunteers - Village WU leaders: For this group, that directly mobilizes households to build a latrine, the most important factors include:

- (i) **Communication skills:** Although the volunteers were trained on communication skills, these skills are not something that can be learnt after one or a few hours of

training. Currently, the project is still facing weakness in its communication skill instruction, training and enhancing activities; each volunteer received two training courses from the project, which focused more on introducing the project procedures than transferring communication knowledge and skills. It is because of the lack of these skills that the volunteers were not self-confident enough to organize “group meetings” as required by the project to properly promote the project’s messages. Therefore, the main communication form at the moment is “household visits,” talking to individuals separately. As a result, the key “messages” from the project passed on to the community were not clear and consistent, and more importantly, incomplete in at least two of the study communes.

- (ii) **Latrine financing and affordability counseling and analysis capacity:** The field study shows that in good performance communes/villages, the volunteers knew how to provide information and financial analysis about latrine building costs, the possibility of purchase on credit, and sources of loans to potential households. With accurate information about how much they need to spend on building a latrine, the households have a higher likelihood of making the decision, or coming up with a saving scheme and a clearer plan for latrine building. This is very important; quite a lot of volunteers (even in good performance communes) still do not know how to provide cost analysis and counseling to households.
- (iii) **Planning capacity:** The project expects (as in the Implementation Manual) that the volunteers must carry out the planning step, separating potential CHOBA households into 3 groups based on their financial situation and developing a separate plan for each group. However, this was not well implemented, mainly because the volunteers did not have the necessary skills and did not know how to categorize and plan for different groups. The project needs to pay attention to this activity.

District Project Steering Board and District Women’s Union: The district WU provides direct guidance to the commune WUs and has a relatively large role and influence on the project progress and activities in the communes. So far the district WU’s proactiveness in the role of standing agency of the district Project Steering Board has not been very clear. The district WU has been almost only responsible for data consolidating and reporting, appraising rebated households, and summarizing reports from communes to report to the provincial WU. The district WU needs more decentralization to have more ownership and to proactively manage, monitor and carry out some activities to help push the project progress. For example, the district WU can organize regular meetings with the commune PMUs to share experience, speed up the progress of weak performance communes, and support necessary tools for the project activities. Currently, all activities related to management and training have always been organized by the provincial WU. There is a need for stronger decentralization and the district WU needs to receive more funding for part of the management expenses (in addition to the current fixed amount of 80,000 VND/commune/month).

Key driving factors for good performance project commune include:

Provision of preferential loans The preferential loans for household water supply and sanitation improvement via the Vietnam Bank for Social Policy or the revolving funds have been the most important factor in helping speed up latrine coverage increase. Actual field studies show that every study commune that received a large amount of credit achieved a considerable increase in latrine coverage. With the current limited credit source from the VBSP (in most of the communes, except those in Yen Khanh district), the project should not set a too high target for latrine coverage increase, making it difficult to achieve the target.

Introduction and promotion of low-cost latrine technologies Hygienic latrine models with low cost and affordable for households are a factor contributing to the increase in latrine coverage. The application of concrete ring technology has enabled septic tank latrines to be built at the cost of 6-8 million VND. However, this technology has not been widely introduced. In some communes, because the low-cost latrine model had not been introduced, many households built their latrines together with other secondary structures such as bathroom, kitchen, yard, etc., resulting in huge costs, from 20 to 25 million VND. This created a “norm” in the community, preventing poor and economic hardship households from “daring to think about building a latrine” because it would be too expensive. The project should introduce low-cost latrine technologies with adequate information about technical details and estimated costs in the local area to provide more options for the households.

What has the project left out?

Ensuring technical requirements is an important factor. In at least 2 of the study communes, the community members reported that some septic tank latrines have been broken, and smelly, etc., because some technical specifications were not met during the construction process. Although these latrines are not CHOBA ones, the project should still take this problem into account. Currently, the technical monitoring and assistance is still being skipped.

Other aspects that need further consideration

Targeting

The project has applied the same beneficiary targeting approach to all of the communes, which is targeting poor and near-poor households, and economic hardship households but not to exceed 20% of the total number of households in the commune (households without hygienic latrines). However, different communes have different levels of wealth, economic conditions and pre-CHOBA latrine coverage (some communes had only 10% coverage, while some other communes had 50% coverage). This resulted in the fact that in “better off” communes, people have a higher living standard, which is often associated with higher pre-CHOBA latrine coverage, and thus a higher chance of getting rebates to the 20%

economic hardship HHs; even some better off households could be included in the beneficiary list. Meanwhile, these 20% of households may still be much better off than the 20% of households in poor communes. Observations in the study communes show that in many cases, households that built latrines at several tens of millions of VND were also rebated in “well off” communes, while the CHOBA rebate seemed insignificant in these cases. Meanwhile, in poor communes, the starting coverage rate was low, which meant more households were in need of latrines, but due to the 20% limit, many households who were more economic hardship and wished to receive CHOBA rebates could not enter the beneficiary list.

In the future, East Meets West should continue further studies and can consider applying the 20% economic hardship household limit in combination with some other benchmarks; to poorer communes with lower coverage, a higher quota than 20% should be applied, while a lower quota should be applied to communes with higher starting coverage.

References

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