

VIETNAM LOCAL WORKS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH STUDY

Purpose

This brief summarizes a study of the USAID-funded Local Works for Environmental Health activity implemented by the Institute of Population, Health, and Development (PHAD). This study explored PHAD's process of engaging partners to make water works more locally owned and sustainable, providing insight on how collective action can be adapted for both current and new USAID activities.

Method

The study's findings are derived from a desk review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, site visits, and a data validation session with PHAD and USAID.

Background

Despite remarkable strides in both economic and health metrics over the past few decades, Vietnam's development continues to be challenged by many issues. Among these challenges, water pollution is a common and serious problem, negatively impacting the health of the Vietnamese population. To address this challenge, PHAD is testing USAID's Local Works locally led development approach, where local actors set their own development agendas, develop solutions, and bring the capacity, leadership, and resources to make those solutions a reality.



Meeting with villagers in Chue Cau Village, Ha Lam, Thanh Hoa. Photo Credit: Vietnam Learns

Findings

Process to Develop a Network for Collective Action

Initializing stage

PHAD selected appropriate provinces, as Ha Nam and Thanh Hoa have urgent water supply needs. PHAD began by conducting workshops and seminars at the national and provincial levels to disseminate information on water and health issues and conducted baseline surveys and needs assessments on clean water and sanitation to plan the intervention. However, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) might be a more appropriate government counterpart than the Center for Disease Control and Prevention because DARD is responsible for managing the rural water supply.

Convening stage



PHAD successfully established the Vietnam Water and Health Alliance (VIWHA). However, the members of VIWHA primarily work in policy advocacy, development, education, and health, with only a few members from the water sector. VIWHA still has no clear rules governing members' duties and interests, so members are passive in supporting Local Works for Environmental Health Project (LWP)'s initiatives.

Transforming stage



PHAD coordinated with several VIWHA members to implement the initiatives, and other members indicated enthusiasm to support the efforts related to their professional fields. Under the collective action framework, communication and coordination among provincial departments, local actors, VIWHA, and LWP could be improved by sharing annual work plans and implementation mechanisms more clearly, thereby empowering actors to identify opportunities for collective action. Moreover, at the time of this study, local actors at the commune level often lacked understanding regarding which initiatives will be implemented and how they would be engaged in the process. Some tasks are still pending implementation.

As to LWP's advocacy efforts, the Water Ambassador Campaign organized by the Management and Sustainable Development Institute had impressive results for teachers and pupils at Ha Lam Commune. This sort of activity should be replicated at more schools.

Way Forward and Recommendations

For USAID

Reevaluate whether collective action is the right approach for this development challenge.

Instead of establishing a Water Health Alliance to initiate collective action, it is better to promote cooperation among local actors for specific activities in each intervention area.

Require that PHAD implement a feedback process for local stakeholders and that PHAD take action based on local feedback.

For PHAD

Study local situations carefully to select the right counterparts.

Develop a clear engagement process for VIWHA members and local actors to encourage them to be proactive in implementation.

To promote locally led development, adopt a coordinator role to connect local actors to implement community-driven activities and adapt to the working environment at the provincial level.

To read the full report, please visit [here](#).

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