

Women's empowerment in Vietnam through rural sanitation partnerships: The Community Based Output-Based Aid Program (CHOBA)

Institute for Sustainable Futures



About the authors

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East Meets West/Thrive Networks was founded by Le Ly Hayslip in 1988 to heal wounds from the war, and to support the most vulnerable people in Vietnam through grass roots development projects. Since then, the organization has evolved, and now implements large scale programs focused on basic service provision through government systems, mass organisations and the private sector. East Meets West also has operations in Cambodia and Lao PDR.

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Cover photo: Nguyen Thi No (right) receives advice from a Women's Union volunteer (left) regarding the latrine her family purchased through the CHOPA program. Taken in Long Hung Commune, Chau Thanh District, Tien Giang Province, EMW.

Executive Summary

Background

The purpose of the research was to examine the extent to which individual and institutional empowerment was experienced within the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) as a result of its partnership with East Meets West (EMW) to implement the Community Hygiene Output-Based Aid (CHOBA) program. The CHOBA program, implemented between 2012 and 2016, encouraged 113,500 poor households in 500 communes from 10 provinces across Vietnam to construct hygienic latrines.

The Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) was the principal implementing partner of CHOBA. This partnership decision was based on EMW's recognition that CHOBA aimed not only to benefit women and girls and their families, but also had the potential to empower VWU volunteers through their roles as sanitation change agents at the household and community level. Additionally, EMW recognised VWU effectiveness and reach from the central level down to the village level.

The research was designed in recognition that gender equality outcomes can be promoted alongside other development outcomes (in this case, sanitation outcomes) and at a number of levels within a program, in this case, within the program partner organisation.

Specifically, the objectives of the research were:

1. to determine the extent to which Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) volunteers were empowered through their involvement with CHOBA
2. to determine the impact of CHOBA on the status and level of influence of the VWU as an institution and Vietnam's predominant organisation for women
3. to examine if CHOBA had influenced the Government of Vietnam's sanitation program to be more responsive to the needs of women and children (especially girls) by enhancing the role of the VWU, and their involvement in CHOBA.

Research approach and methods

The research was a qualitative exploration, centred on semi-structured interviews with 43 key informants. Two provinces; Hoa Binh and Tra Vinh, were selected as sites for the research, as well as the Capital, Hanoi. We randomly sampled 20 VWU volunteers at the village level and purposively sampled 23 VWU stakeholders and other sanitation-sector stakeholders at commune, province and central levels.

An analytical approach was developed around key conceptual framings and an existing gender outcomes framework, which enabled a targeted exploration of individual empowerment and institutional empowerment.

Gender equality outcomes at an individual level were explored within four broad categories:

1. positive changes in roles or increased status in the community
2. increased self-confidence
3. positive changes in role and relationships in the household
4. increased access to educational and economic opportunities.

Institutional influence was explored within two broad categories:

1. positive change in the roles of the VWU at different levels
2. increased influence of the VWU over decisions and policy in the sanitation sector

Key findings

Individual empowerment of VWU volunteers

CHOBA succeeded in contributing to women's empowerment at an individual level as demonstrated by evidence that 14 out of 20 (70%) VWU Volunteers at the village level reported experiencing positive gender equality outcomes as a result of their engagement in the program. These volunteers experienced empowerment primarily in the form of increased status in their community, and also in terms of increased self-confidence and positive changes in roles and relationships in their households.

These experiences were reported by volunteers in the context of their work in the CHOBA program, and 14 volunteers (100%) who reported at least one positive gender equality outcome made clear links between the changes they had experienced and their participation in CHOBA.

Five out of 20 volunteers (25%) reported drawbacks or negative aspects of their involvement in CHOBA including significant investments of time, travel to cover large areas and persistent and repeated household visits required to persuade households and assist with loan applications in order to achieve latrine coverage targets.

Institutional empowerment of VWU

CHOBA succeeded in supporting the VWU as an institution to gain new roles in the sanitation sector and to increase its influence over decision-making in operationalisation of sanitation-related activities and targets at the provincial and commune level. There was also evidence of a recognition from political stakeholders of the effectiveness of the VWU to implement a complex and results-based program using strategic mobilisation and loan facilitation techniques.

At the central level, the research did not uncover a strong contribution of CHOBA to increased influence of the VWU over national sanitation policy, however it did reveal new roles for the VWU in the sanitation sector. In terms of the VWU being able to influence greater commitments to gender responsiveness in program and policy design at the central level, the research did not uncover evidence of this, which is not altogether surprising given the complex policy-making environment at the central level and the fact that CHOBA activities were concentrated at commune and provincial level.

Conclusion and recommendations

EMW's decision to partner with the VWU has proven to yield positive results in terms of individual empowerment of VWU volunteers at village level, and institutional status and influence of the VWU at commune, province and central levels (to varying degrees). For this reason, recommendations from the research are designed to guide EMW towards continuing the good practices that the findings highlighted, whilst paying attention to some areas for improvement and most importantly, towards finding strong methods to monitor and evaluate the gender equality outcomes being achieved alongside sanitation outcomes in its programs.

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Acronyms

CHOBA	Community Hygiene Output-Based Aid Program
CPC	Commune People's Committees
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EMW	East Meets West
GoV	Government of Vietnam
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MOH	Ministry of Health
NRD	New Rural Development Program
NTP	National Sanitation Target Program
PMB	Project Management Board (CHOBA)
PMC	Preventative Medical Centre
PPC	Provincial People's Committee
VBSP	Vietnam Bank for Social Policy
VIHEMA	Vietnam Health Environment Management Agency
VND	Vietnamese Dong
VWU	Vietnam Women's Union
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 CHOBA program overview

The Community Hygiene Output-Based Aid (CHOBA) program, implemented by East Meets West (EMW) between 2012 and 2016, encouraged 113,500 poor households in 500 communes from 10 provinces across Vietnam to construct hygienic latrines. CHOBA had a direct impact on the health and well-being of nearly half a million people—all belonging to the poorest 40%. It was designed to influence households at critical stages of their sanitation decision making process and, thus, incorporated the key elements of traditional sanitation promotion programs:

- An information and education campaign
- Supply chain improvement through training of masons
- Access to affordable credit (primarily from the Vietnam Bank for Social Policy, VBSP).

A unique feature of CHOBA was its clear focus on results through output-based incentives to poor households, the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) and its volunteers and to Commune People's Committees (CPC) participating in the program. Poor families who purchased and installed a latrine received incentive payments in the form of rebates of approximately USD 28. The Women's Union and local governments who worked together to promote latrine uptake and manage the rebate process were paid based on the number of latrines installed and used by poor households, as were village volunteers who conducted community engagement and awareness-building activities.¹

The Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) was the principal implementing partner for CHOBA. This decision was based on EMW's recognition that CHOBA aimed not only to benefit women and girls and their families, but CHOBA also had the potential to empower VWU volunteers as change agents at the household and community level. EMW also recognised VWU effectiveness and reach from the central level down to the village level.

To oversee the program, Project Management Boards (PMB) were established in each targeted province and commune. Membership of each PMB included key government stakeholders in Vietnam's sanitation sector. These were People's Committee officials (equivalent to officials from state or local government), health sector officials, and village heads. The Women's Union at provincial and commune levels had key leadership roles on the PMBs, reflecting their overall management and leadership role under CHOBA.

The main CHOBA activities were also conducted or led by VWU chapters at the central, provincial, district and commune levels. An information and education campaign was conducted by the commune VWU and village volunteers to trigger demand for sanitation. This was rolled out through commune meetings, as well as repeated household visits with sharing of practical information about constructing a latrine. The VWU facilitated credit allocations to target communes, and the commune VWU and village volunteers administered the loans directly at the household level. The VWU also identified and trained local masons in construction of hygienic latrines. Critically, the VWU connected all these pieces of the

¹ For a more comprehensive description of CHOBA, see Ljung et al. (2015). 'Targeting the poor in sanitation and hygiene programs through result-based financing in Vietnam', Working Paper, East Meets West, Vietnam.

sanitation ecosystem, in order to make the choice and process of a latrine purchase smooth and convenient for each household.

At the village level, approximately 5,000 VWU volunteers were engaged in CHOBA. As mentioned above, these volunteers were primarily responsible for community engagement and awareness-building activities, visiting individual households to encourage latrine installation and helping households to apply for loans. Volunteers received USD 2 (40,000 VND) per latrine installed as a performance-based incentive (to place this in local context, USD 2 is equivalent to around one full petrol tank in a motor scooter).

Table 1 outlines the contribution that the VWU made to key components of the program.

Table 1: Contribution of VWU to CHOBA

CHOBA program component	Contribution of VWU
Coordination and oversight	Had a formal role (Vice Chair or Secretary) on project management boards (PMB) at commune, provincial and central level. Coordinated field activities at commune level.
Information and education campaign	Conducted information and education campaign at village-level, including advising households on latrine options and benefits of purchasing latrines
Supply chain improvement through training of masons	Coordinated the training of masons
Access to affordable credit (primarily from the Vietnam Bank for Social Policy, VBSP)	Facilitated access to credit for households through the VBSP

CHOBA targeted the poorest 40% of the rural population and it achieved one third of the Government of Vietnam’s (GoV) whole latrine target under the National Target Program 3 (NTP3). Following CHOBA, EMW has engaged the VWU to perform similar roles for three additional output-based aid (OBA) sanitation projects: WASHOBA and WOBA, funded through the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) Civil Society WASH Fund II and their Water for Women Fund, as well as CHOBA 2, funded through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

1.2 Research rationale and purpose

1.2.1 Rationale

EMW, through its monitoring and evaluation of CHOBA, had gathered mostly anecdotal evidence that the program may have contributed to empowerment of VWU volunteers at village level. Benefits to VWU volunteers were reported, such as new skills and self-confidence, increased status in the community and additional respect within their family as a result of bringing in additional income.

EMW also observed that the organisational arrangements for CHOBA may have increased the influence of the VWU on sanitation decisions at the provincial and commune level, particularly through their Vice-Chair or Secretary roles on the CHOBA project management boards at the provincial and at the commune level. At the central level, the VWU was included as a member of the Standing Committee for the NTP (2 and 3) where it could directly influence sanitation policy – although, the NTP 3 standing committee was established during the first year of CHOBA and so the program is unlikely to have influenced this decision.

The successful implementation of CHOBA demonstrated that the VWU had capacity to implement large scale sanitation programs. As a result, EMW believed that its status and influence within the sanitation sector and rural development more broadly, were enhanced.

In light of these indicators, EMW wanted to rigorously investigate the extent to which individual or institutional empowerment of the VWU took place as a result of the VWU role in the CHOBA program.

1.2.2 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the research was to examine the extent to which practical and strategic gender outcomes were achieved for the VWU through the CHOBA program.

Specifically, the objectives of the research were:

1. to determine the extent to which Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) volunteers were empowered through their involvement with CHOBA
2. to determine the impact of CHOBA on the status and level of influence of the VWU as an institution and the Vietnam's premier organisation for women
3. to examine if CHOBA has influenced the Government of Vietnam's sanitation program to be more responsive to the needs of women and children (especially girls) by enhancing the role of the VWU, and their involvement in CHOBA.

1.3 Research questions

The research centred around three key questions which are derived from the objectives above:

1. To what extent have Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) volunteers at the commune level been empowered through their involvement with the Community Hygiene Output-Based Aid (CHOBA) program?
2. To what extent has CHOBA contributed to an increased level of influence of the VWU as an institution in the sanitation sector and the predominant organisation for women in Vietnam at the provincial and central levels?
3. To what extent has the VWU, through their involvement in CHOBA, influenced the sanitation sector at the national level to be more responsive to the needs of women and girls?

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Qualitative research approach

A predominantly qualitative approach was used for the research, with the central method of semi-structured interviews. Given the complexity of the concepts of empowerment and gender equality, there was potential for misunderstanding of questions and/or positive bias to occur (a tendency for the respondents to provide positive answers which would need to be verified). Therefore, a qualitative approach was preferred over a quantitative approach.

2.2 Sites and research sample

The research sample can be broken into six groups, which were defined based on the research questions outlined in 1.3.

1. Vietnam Women's Union village-level volunteers. 20 women were recruited for the study from across four communes, in two provinces
2. Vietnam Women's Union representatives from CHOBA provincial and communal Project Management Boards, from across four communes, in two provinces
3. other (non-VWU) stakeholders from CHOBA provincial and communal Project Management Boards, mainly from the People's Committee
4. Vietnam Women's Union representatives at the central level
5. other (non-VWU) stakeholders in the sanitation sector at the central level
6. East Meets West personnel at the central level.

A mix of random and purposive sampling was used to select the respondents for the study. For VWU volunteers, respondents were selected randomly from complete lists of CHOBA volunteers, taken from two villages within the commune. For VWU stakeholders and non-VWU stakeholders, respondents were selected according to the roles they held in the sanitation sector during the time of the CHOBA program

A more detailed overview of the sample at each level and in each location is included in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Research sample

Location	Participants	Number in sample	Process for selection
CENTRAL			
Hanoi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy head - Health & Environment Office; VIHEMA • Main Officer - Standing Office for NTP • Vice-Chairperson, Vietnam Women's Union • Former EMW Country Director • EMW's Program Officers and Program Assistants 	4	Purposive sampling
PROVINCIAL			

Hòa Bình province (capital city)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provincial People's Committee representative Provincial Preventive Medical Center representative Vietnam Women's Union representative 	3	Purposive sampling
Trà Vinh Province (capital city)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provincial Preventive Medical Center representative Trà Vinh Provincial Bank for Social Policy representative Vietnam Women's Union representative 	3	Purposive sampling
COMMUNE			
Hợp Châu Commune, Lương Sơn District, Hòa Bình Province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communal People's Committee Vietnam Women's Union representative Head of Communal Health Station 	3	Purposive sampling
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's Union CHOBA volunteers 	5	Random sampling
Hòa Bình Commune, Hòa Bình City, Hòa Bình Province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communal People's Committee Vietnam Women's Union representative Head of Communal Health Station 	3	Purposive sampling
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's Union CHOBA volunteers 	5	Random sampling
Long Đức commune, Trà Vinh city, Trà Vinh province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communal People's Committee Vietnam Women's Union representative The Fatherland Front of Long Đức commune 	3	Purposive sampling
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's Union CHOBA volunteers 	5	Random sampling
Xã Long Thới, Tiểu Cần District, Trà Vinh province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communal People's Committee Village People's Committee Vietnam Women's Union representative 	3	Purposive sampling
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's Union CHOBA volunteers 	5	Random sampling
Total interviewees		43	

2.3 Research tools

2.3.1 Semi-structured interview tool

Question guides were developed collaboratively between ISF-UTS and EMW. Separate guides were developed for the six different groups within the research sample (listed in Section 2.2 above).

A set of overarching questions were included in the guides and these relied on probing techniques to uncover the gender changes experienced by individual VWU volunteers or institutionally as reported either by VWU stakeholders, other stakeholders in the sanitation sector or EMW personnel at commune, province or national level. Furthermore, questions explored the contribution of CHOBA to the experiences respondents described.

Interview guides also incorporated a small number of questions designed to derive quantitative data, for example, through the use of scales. The analysis was also complemented by quantification of the gender outcomes reported.

2.4 Analytical approach

Data were collected and analysed against the three research questions using a number of analytical techniques including thematic analysis, comparative analysis and quantification of the qualitative data. Analysis drew on two conceptual framings which are outlined below, including:

1. individual empowerment
2. institutional influence.

2.4.1 Individual empowerment

The research questions and analytical framework drew on a conceptual framework for classifying gender equality changes associated with WASH initiatives that was co-developed by ISF-UTS as well as a definition of individual empowerment. These are outlined below.

Practical and strategic gender outcomes

This conceptual framework draws on the Moser gender planning tool² and reiterates the importance of paying attention to both the practical and strategic needs³ of women in development planning. This framework is useful to think through the types of gender equality outcomes that development interventions (in this case, a WASH intervention) may be able to influence, as well as the domains within which these are experienced by individuals. The framework is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Framework of gender equality outcomes associated with WASH⁴

	Household sphere <i>Household and family networks</i>	Public arena	
		Local public arena <i>Social and community networks</i>	Broader public arena <i>Governance institutions and beyond</i>
Changes in self/ individuals <i>Includes changes for women or men</i> <i>Includes changes relating to roles as</i>	Changes in roles, self-perceptions and attitudes within the household sphere, related to family networks and	Changes in roles, self-perceptions and attitudes within the local public arena including social networks,	Changes in roles, self-perceptions and attitudes within the broader public arena including national and sub-national government

² Moser, C.O.N. (1993) 'Gender Planning and Development: theory, practice & training', Routledge, London and New York.

³ Practical gender needs are a response to immediate perceived necessity or inadequacies in living conditions such as water provision, health care, and employment. They are practical in nature and do not challenge the gendered divisions of labour or women's subordinate position in society. Strategic gender needs are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society. They relate to gendered divisions of labour, power and control. Meeting strategic gender needs helps women to achieve greater equality. Moser's tool draws on distinction between practical and strategic gender needs and interests originally made by Molyneux. See Molyneux, M (1985) Mobilization without emancipation? Women's interests, the State and revolution in Nicaragua, *Revolution in Nicaragua, Feminist Studies*, 11:2 (1985: Summer) p 227-254

⁴ Carrard, N.R., Crawford, J., Halcrow, G., Rowland, C. and Willetts, J.R. (2013) 'A framework for exploring gender equality outcomes from WASH programmes', *Waterlines: international journal of water, sanitation and waste*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 315-333.

<i>well as self-perception and attitudes</i>	household roles and responsibilities	community and local institutions	institutions, medium to large scale private sector actors
Changes in relationships <i>Includes changes in relationships between women/men and within gender groups</i>	Changes in relationships within the household sphere, related to family networks and household roles and responsibilities	Changes in relationships within the local public arena including social networks, community and local institutions	Changes in relationships within the broader public arena including national and sub-national government institutions, medium to large scale private sector actors

Individual empowerment

The analytical approach for exploring individual empowerment was informed by a definition of empowerment which draws on the gender outcomes framework (above) as well as several internationally recognised definitions or conceptualisations of empowerment.

These included Kabeer's model of empowerment which centres on women's ability to exercise choice (including dimensions of resources, agency and achievement)⁵; Longwe's women's empowerment framework⁶ which describes women having power alongside men to influence their destiny and that of their society; and UN Women's proposition that empowerment involves awareness-raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources.⁷

These ideas were taken into account to develop a definition to suit the context and purpose of this research. The definition was discussed and finalised during a learning workshop between ISF-UTS and EMW (August 29, 2017). The definition is;

Empowerment has occurred if a woman has experienced a clear increase in her self-confidence, a clear positive change in her roles or relationships in her home, a clear elevation of status in her community (including positive change in her role/s) and/or increased access to economic and educational resources/opportunities. Even if these cannot be compared directly with the situation of men in the same households and communities, it is assumed that these changes reflect women's increased power to manage their lives, put their choices and aims into action and exercise influence in their communities.

Changes described by VWU volunteers were assessed to determine whether they constituted a clear change that indicated empowerment according to this definition.

⁵ Kabeer, N. (1999), 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', *Development & Change*, Vol. 30, pp.435-464.

⁶ For an overview of Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework, see March, C. Smyth, A. I., Mukhopadhyay, M. (1999), *A Guide to Gender-analysis Frameworks*, Oxfam GB, London.

⁷ UN Women Training Centre, 'Gender Equality Glossary', available online at <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36&mode=letter&hook=E&sortkey=&sortorder> (last accessed October 6, 2017).

Drawing on this framing of empowerment and based on the gender outcomes framework described above, four categories of change were used to analyse the experiences reported by the VWU volunteers. These were:

1. positive changes in **roles or increased status in the community**
2. increases in **self-confidence**
3. positive changes in **roles and relationships in the household**
4. increased **access to educational and economic opportunities**.

Comparative analysis was conducted to compare frequency of changes across the four categories.

Thematic analysis was conducted to see what themes emerged within the four categories of change.

Reasons given for change occurring were analysed to determine the proportion of volunteers who could link their experiences of change back to their involvement in CHOBA. Thematic analysis was then used to derive key themes which would describe CHOBA's contribution to individual level empowerment.

2.4.2 Institutional influence

The analytical approach for exploring institutional influence was informed by an overarching definition of influence (taken from the Oxford Dictionary) which is; "the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself." Therefore, two categories of institutional influence were used to analyse the research findings. These were:

1. **positive change in the roles of the VWU at different levels** (central, provincial and commune) which showed that the institution was given greater responsibilities (tasks, assignments) in the sanitation sector or in rural development more broadly as a result of CHOBA.
2. **increased influence of the VWU over decisions and policy in the sanitation sector** as a result of CHOBA.

An additional category was also used in the analysis to capture examples of increased respect and recognition for the VWU due to their work and success in CHOBA. This is reported on separately as it not as strong an indicator of influence, but still shows an increase in the status of the VWU as an institution.

Four categories of change were used to analyse individual empowerment reported by the VWU volunteers. These were:

1. positive changes in roles or increased status in the community
2. increases in self-confidence
3. positive changes in roles and relationships in the household
4. increased access to educational and economic opportunities.

Two categories of change were used to analyse institutional influence reported by the VWU and other stakeholders. These were:

1. positive change in the roles of the VWU at different levels
2. increased influence of the VWU over decisions and policy in the sanitation sector.

2.5 Ethical research practice and training

A formal research ethics application approved through the ISF-UTS ethics process addressed participant selection, informed consent, privacy and data management. Processes and tools were developed by ISF-UTS to obtain informed consent including a research information sheet to share with stakeholders; a formal participant invitation; interview introduction scripts; and clear steps for participant sampling and selection for in-country personnel to follow.

As part of a Methodology Workshop held on 1-2 June, 2017, researchers involved in data collection on the ground were trained in the use of tools for informed consent, as well as in the ACFID Principles for ethical research and evaluation in development, including respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, beneficence and justice.⁸

2.6 Limitations

2.6.1 Positions of authority of the VWU volunteers

It is useful to acknowledge that many of the VWU volunteers who took part in the CHOBA program already held positions of authority within the VWU. The random sampling method used to select VWU volunteers from among complete village lists resulted in all 20 respondents selected for the research being leaders of the VWU at the village level.⁹ For this reason, the research findings should be viewed in light of the existing positions of respect that members of the VWU sampled in this research enjoy.

2.6.2 Scale questions

Several questions were designed into the research which asked respondents to place their responses along a scale. Some of these questions were removed from the quantitative analysis due to inconsistent use of the scale and responses were instead included in qualitative analysis where appropriate.

VWU volunteers provided consistent responses to one question which asked them to provide a 'before and after' rating of their confidence and/or willingness to take action/changes that will benefit the community before their involvement in CHOBA compared to after their involvement in CHOBA. However, it is useful to acknowledge some variation in the responses. Responses were provided in relation to both confidence and/or willingness to take action/changes that will benefit the community. For some volunteers, this was reported in relation to their role in CHOBA specifically and for others it was reported in relation to their general role in the community. Some volunteers' scores also seemed to be reported in relation to the VWU as an institution rather than themselves as individuals (possibly the result of their positions of authority within the VWU as reported above). Findings in relation to this question should be viewed in light of these qualifications.

2.6.3 Small sample groups

Given that the research was designed using qualitative methodology, with some quantification techniques applied, it is important to recognise the impact of small sample groups on reporting of quantitative findings. Presentation of numbers and percentages are

⁸ ACFID (2017) Principles and Guidelines for ethical research and evaluation in development, Australian Council for International Development, Canberra.
https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/ACFID_RDI%20Principles%20and%20Guidelines%20for%20ethical%20research12-07-2017.pdf

⁹ Generally, there are between two and three VWU members in each village, all working on a voluntary basis. Their responsibilities are allocated from their VWU superiors at commune level and above or by the CPC.

designed to provide an indication of evidence only and should be viewed in light of the qualitative explanations presented. This is particularly relevant when reviewing findings which are broken down across levels (commune, provincial and central) and by type of stakeholders (VWU and non-VWU in the sanitation sector).

3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section (3.1) presents the findings around individual empowerment of VWU volunteers in relation to Research Question 1. It explores the overall extent of empowerment before describing the types of gender equality outcomes reported by the VWU volunteers. It also presents findings across levels (household and community), provinces and communes. Finally, it directly explores the links between the empowerment experienced by VWU volunteers and their involvement in the CHOBA program as well as reported on negative experiences of being part of CHOBA that were uncovered by the research.

The second section (3.2) presents findings around institutional empowerment of the VWU in line with Research Questions 2 and 3. It explores the evidence of increased VWU influence in the sanitation sector at commune, provincial and central level and also presents findings of increased VWU influence beyond the sanitation sector (in rural development more broadly). Finally, it presents the research findings in relation to gender responsiveness of the GoV sanitation program.

3.1 Empowerment of Women's Union Volunteers at the village level

3.1.1 Extent of and types of individual empowerment reported

Of the 20 VWU volunteers interviewed, 14 (70%) reported experiencing at least one positive gender related outcome that could be linked back to their involvement in CHOBA. In fact, each of these volunteers reported more than one positive gender outcome which shows the breadth of their experiences.

An assessment of the overall reported experiences of these 14 women revealed 13 cases (65% of all village volunteers interviewed) in which the experience constituted empowerment in line with the parameters of women's empowerment defined for the research (see methodology section 2.4).

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

Gender equality outcomes were reported within four broad categories (refer to 2.4) as listed here. The findings in relation to each of these categories are presented below.

3. positive changes in roles or increased status in the community
4. increased self-confidence
5. positive changes in role and relationships in the household
6. increased access to educational and economic opportunities.

Positive changes in roles and increased status in the community

The most commonly reported gender outcome overall was a **positive change in roles and an increase in status of the VWU volunteers** in their communities. This was reported by 14 out of 20 volunteers (70%). The most common expression of increased status was the VWU volunteers gaining greater respect and appreciation from the community, such as people giving compliments and honour, people giving thanks and rewards, people being more friendly and people recognising and appreciating woman's efforts. One village volunteer in Hop Chau commune reported:

The most commonly reported gender change overall was a positive change in roles and an increased in status of the VWU volunteers in their communities.

"The attitude of the hamlet people is better towards me, which makes me more confident. Not only the VWU sisters but also men themselves, it encourages me, I try to do better" (Interview, 12 June 2017) (see full case study in Box 2 below).

The most common expression of positive changes in women's roles in the community was an increased ability and agency to perform other roles and work, for example, being voted as a delegate to the Commune People's Council.

The most common expression of positive changes in women's roles in the community was an **increased ability and agency to perform other roles and work, for example, being voted as a delegate to the Commune People's Council**, feeling more free to implement ideas and actions, being assigned more difficult tasks, being able to resolve village conflicts and being able to attract more work for the VWU. One volunteer from Long Thoi Commune reported:

"When I started doing CHOBA, I went to mobilize people [and] the men in the hamlet stigmatized me [saying]; "This woman asks many things, why don't women stay at home and look after the family? You come to my house and interfere our things". But now, it is these people who respect me, they often ask me questions and pay regards to me. That makes me happy. My activities in the village now are not only hygiene and sanitation, but also lights for roads, and many other issues." (Interview, 03 July 2017).

Another expression within this category of change was of increased **trust and confidence** from the community, including being asked for advice (including from men), the volunteer's word being more valued and the community opening up to volunteers. Two volunteers described a feeling of being more persuasive with community, with examples reported of women successfully encouraging greater attendance at meetings. One volunteer in Long Thoi Commune reported:

"One day, the Farmers Union invited people to a village meeting but no one came. [When] I myself invited them to the meeting, more than 80% of invited people attended." (Interview, 03 July 2017).

Some reported examples also suggested a **greater recognition** of the volunteers from community leaders and Women's Union superiors, for example being asked to speak first, receiving compliments and being given more support. An example reported by a volunteer in Hoa Binh commune was:

"I have been getting recognition from my commune as well as from the Communist Party. As I mentioned, thanks to joining CHOBA, I have a chance to gain experience, skilfully work on mobilization, get recognition from local authorities, then my voice is being heard and I get more assignments from higher levels." (Interview 14 June, 2017) (see full case study in Box 1 below).

Increased self-confidence

The second most commonly reported positive gender change was an **increase in self-confidence**, which was reported by 12 out of 20 volunteers (60%). One volunteer reported this in a household setting, but the rest of the volunteers reported this happening in a public or community context. Confidence was most commonly reported by volunteers in terms of greater self-worth including self-belief, pride, feeling less worried, less shy and more satisfied. Self-confidence was also commonly reported in terms of communication and speaking in public as well as feeling confident in knowledge and ability. Self-confidence was reported a few times as feeling loved and respected, feeling a greater level of influence and feeling supported in their community.

This example shared by one volunteer in Hop Chau commune highlights the positive outcomes resulting from a volunteer's experiences of increased self-confidence:

"Before I did not raise my ideas in meetings. Now in hamlet meetings, I raise my ideas if there is any issue, I am more confident. The project helps me become more confident in meetings, helps me improve my mobilizing skill. One example is that: In my hamlet, there was one part of the road that was destroyed but the hamlet authorities did not mobilize people to fix that part. In the hamlet's meeting, I raised that and the authorities agreed to mobilize people to fix it. I was the first person who raised the idea." (Interview, 12 June 2017).

Positive changes in household roles and relations

The third most commonly reported gender outcome was related to **improved roles and relationships in the village volunteers' homes** and with their families changing for the better as a result of their involvement in CHOBA, which was reported by nine out of 20 volunteers (45%). The most common expression for this in the responses given by volunteers was experiencing greater support from husbands and other family members. Support may have been in the form of encouragement, family creating favourable conditions, support with housework, and husbands no longer preventing or discouraging women from performing their public roles. Some women explained this in terms of greater love, understanding, respect and trust from their families. One woman in Hop Chau Commune reported:

"My husband listens to me more for sure, he also trusts me more. Now I can say that he trusts me 100%. I can do what I say. My husband also supports and follows my decisions" (Interview, 12 June, 2017)

Another common example was that the volunteers felt they had **greater voice and agency**, such as greater voice in the family, husbands listening and following and women feeling they were free to do what they chose. One woman in Hoa Binh commune reported that; "I have more voice in my family because my job contributes to the community." (Interview, 14 June, 2017). Another volunteer in the same commune reported; "Before, my husband was quite afraid, but then he saw that there was no problem with my work so he also created favourable conditions for me to fulfil the tasks" (Interview, 14 June, 2017).

Three women specifically reported having a greater decision-making role in the home such as this volunteer in Hop Chau commune who said;

"My voice has become more important. For example, if I have any comments/ideas my husband would listen to me more. For example, I want to make one compartment for the pig cage, my husband agrees. Before, it was mostly that my husband decided by himself." (Interview, 12 June, 2017).

Increased access to educational and economic opportunities

The least commonly reported gender outcome was increased access to educational or economic opportunities and only one volunteer out of 20 (5%) reported such a change. The volunteer who reported such a change described her decision to attend training for an insurance company in order to further the persuasion and mobilisation skills she had gained through CHOBA. She realised she was able to use those skills to work as an insurance dealer as well and subsequently gained employment with an insurance company. This shows that the skills she gained in CHOBA are transferrable to other paid positions. She reported that:

“If there were no CHOBA, I would be inside the house. I had no chance to see activities people were doing outside. Now I am working to mobilize people and additionally, I have second job as an insurance dealer. That generates more income. I feel very happy.”
(Interview, 03 July 2017, Long Thoi Commune).

This section provides an overview of the quantitative evidence, including results of one scale-based question, showing empowerment of VWU volunteers. It also outlines the overall differences between household and community levels and across provinces and communes.

Scale-based results showing increased empowerment

In addition to asking women open ended questions which gave them space to report specific empowerment changes they had experienced through their involvement in CHOBA, the volunteers were asked a broad question about how confident or willing they felt to make suggestions or to take action/make changes that they thought would improve their community. They were asked to give themselves a rating out of five to indicate their level of confidence to do so 'before CHOBA' and 'after CHOBA' (1 indicating no confidence and 5 indicating high level of confidence).

For 11 out of 13 volunteers who provided a self-rating (85%), their score 'after CHOBA' increased by an average of 2.4 points (out of five) compared to 'before CHOBA', indicating increased confidence to take action to improve their community.

This self-assessment rating was provided by 13 out of 20 (65%) respondents. For 11 out of 13 volunteers who provided a self-rating (85%), their score 'after CHOBA' increased by an average of 2.4 points (out of five) compared to 'before CHOBA', indicating increased confidence to take action to improve their community.¹⁰

For five out of 13 volunteers (38%) who provided a self-rating, their score increased by 3 or more points (out of five) since their involvement in CHOBA which showed a significant increase in self-confidence or willingness to take action and make changes for their community. For 12 of the 13 who responded (92%), their 'after CHOBA' score was 4 or above, which shows that more than half of all volunteers interviewed have a high level of confidence or willingness to take action and make changes for their community.

Household and community level changes

Most of the gender related outcomes (26 out of 36) were reported in a community context as compared to a household context. This is not surprising given that volunteers' work in CHOBA was public and community-based, nevertheless, positive outcomes were also reported in relation to the household level where volunteers experienced changes in their

¹⁰ The two remaining volunteers did not provide a 'before CHOBA' score, only an 'after CHOBA' score.

roles and relationships with the other members of their households and families as described earlier in this section.

Differences across provinces and communes

The research did not reveal any difference between the two Provinces in terms of the amount of change reported, despite their location in very different parts of Vietnam (North and South). In each Province, Hoa Binh in the North and Tra Vinh in the South, seven out of 10 (70 percent) of the volunteers experienced at least one positive gender related outcome. However, *within* the provinces, differences were found between communes as explained below and summarised in Table 4: Positive gender outcomes reported across two Provinces.

In Hoa Binh commune (Hoa Binh Province), two out of five volunteers experienced at least one positive gender related outcome, compared with five out of five women in Hop Chau commune. There were a few factors which may help to explain this result. In Hoa Binh commune, one respondent had joined the project late so could not easily report on changes she had experienced. Another two respondents already held high level positions in the village prior to the commencement of CHOBA and did not report any increased examples of empowerment that could be specifically linked to their involvement in CHOBA.

In Long Duc commune (Tra Vinh Province), two out of five volunteers experienced at least one gender outcome, compared with five out of five women in Long Thoi commune. This result may in part be explained by the situation in Long Duc commune, which saw the role of the VWU in the CHOBA program diminished after the Commune People's Committee (CPC) took responsibility for the program in 2015. The CPC operated an intensive campaign for latrine coverage, giving VWU a smaller role which was mostly paperwork and running a small number of mobilisation meetings at the village level. It was therefore difficult for volunteers to describe changes they had experienced as a result of the minor involvement they had in the program.

Table 4: Positive gender outcomes reported across two Provinces

Province	Commune	Number of women reporting at least one positive gender related outcome Percentage	Possible explanation for low number of gender outcomes reported
Hoa Binh	Hop Chau	5 of 5 (100%)	
	Hoa Binh	2 of 5 (40%)	One respondent had joined CHOBA late. Two respondents held high positions in the village (e.g. Village Head)
Tra Vinh	Long Thoi	5 of 5 (100%)	
	Long Duc	2 of 5 (40%)	Role of the VWU in CHOBA was restricted by the CPC to paperwork and running a small number of mobilisation meetings

3.1.2 CHOBA's contribution to gender equality outcomes and empowerment

This section gives an outline of the contribution of the CHOBA program to the gender equality outcomes and empowerment of VWU volunteers reported above. Mirroring the preceding section, the findings are reported in relation to:

1. positive changes in roles or increased status in the community
2. increased self-confidence
3. positive changes in role and relationships in the household
4. increased access to educational and economic opportunities.

The CHOBA program utilised particular training techniques and supported volunteers to gain experience through training and its practical application in mobilisation work. Some of these were clearly highlighted by the volunteers in their interview responses. Training characteristics and approaches included practical and technical training in traditionally male skill sets (e.g. construction); provision of technical knowledge (about sanitation and hygiene); visits to other communes to gain knowledge from other people and VWU members; practice preparing content; provision and use of a manual; emphasising a professional approach; communication and advocacy skills and step by step process for solving issues. Training was then directly applied to practice.

As reported above, 14 CHOBA volunteers reported experiencing at least one positive gender outcome. These experiences were reported in the context of their work in the CHOBA program, and detailed analysis of interview data also revealed that all 14 volunteers (100%) made clear links between the changes they had experienced and their participation in CHOBA.¹¹

CHOBA's contribution to VWU volunteers' roles and status in the community

Learning skills and accumulating experience through CHOBA led to successful mobilisation and positive benefits for households in the community, resulting in women gaining increased recognition, a greater voice and more roles in the community.

Volunteers had the opportunity to meet people and were able to learn about important issues which they then raised with community leaders. Women reported that connections gained through household mobilisation made other tasks and responsibilities easier, and through their successful work in CHOBA, women gained motivation and an openness to take on other tasks for different issues.

CHOBA's contribution to increased self-confidence of VWU volunteers

From women's responses, it was clear that the volunteer's increased self-confidence came about as a result of the contribution of various elements within CHOBA. Knowledge gained through CHOBA (for example, about the benefits of latrines and sanitation outcomes, the technical aspects of latrine installation and access to loans) coupled with the opportunity to carry out mobilisation

Knowledge gained through CHOBA (for example, about the benefits of latrines and sanitation outcomes, the technical aspects of latrine installation and access to loans) coupled with the opportunity to carry out mobilisation through household visits led to increased confidence to communicate, interact and work with people.

¹¹ For 6 women who did not report a gender outcome, their experience of CHOBA was not analysed

through household visits led to increased confidence to communicate as well as increased confidence and comfort to interact and work with people.

Furthermore, the experience of helping members of their community (for example, to obtain loans) allowed the VWU volunteers to establish greater connection with people and this increased their confidence. Additionally, participating in training and gaining experience of using new knowledge to mobilise households appeared to lead to increased confidence to perform other tasks. One volunteer in Long Thoi reported:

“[The] project helps me to understand how to work, I learn that work requires professional procedures and steps to get work done. Before I just mobilized people. For other activities, the hamlet VWU also mobilized on many things/contents, for example the “5 No 3 Clean program”, but that was just general mobilization. And there was no specific guidance on the way to implement it so it was also hard for people to implement. Since my involvement in CHOBA, I see the good thing is that we have to ask specifically about things always, and have to provide people with clear and thorough guidance. Because of that people will be able to do things and they would respect us more” (Interview, 03 July, 2017)

CHOBA's contribution to changes in roles and relationships in VWU volunteers' households

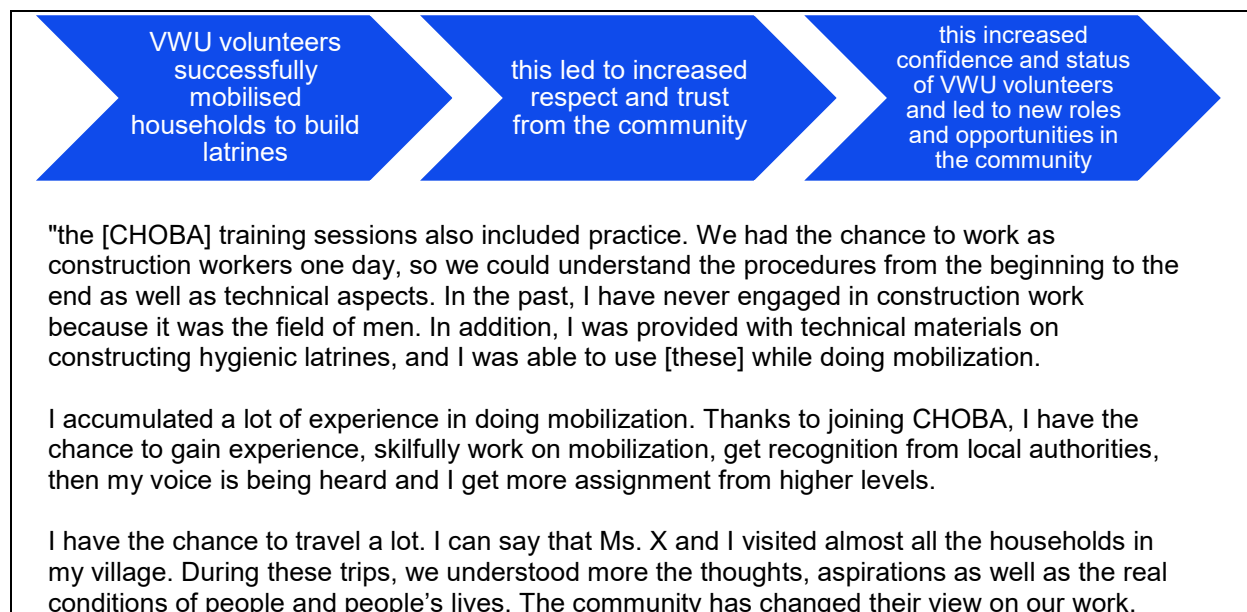
In terms of CHOBA's contribution to gender equality outcomes in households, the main finding was that seeing increased appreciation and trust in the VWU volunteers shown by the community encouraged husbands to listen to and support their wives. Due to more compliments given by neighbours, family members showed more trust in the volunteers which gave them greater independence to make decisions.

Seeing increased appreciation and trust in the VWU volunteers shown by the community encouraged husbands to listen to and support their wives.

Case examples of CHOBA pathways contributing to individual empowerment

Overall, three clear pathways emerged from the research which started with CHOBA and led to experiences of empowerment reported by VWU volunteers. It is useful to look at the overall experience (case examples) of three VWU volunteers to demonstrate the common pathways that led to change. These are shown in Box 1, Box 2 and Box 3 below.

Box 1: First CHOBA pathway leading to individual empowerment



Upon every completed hygienic latrine, they get a disbursement and enjoy a new, hygienic latrine. Then they recognize that result is thanks to our effort, so they begin to believe in us. Our reputation is enforced. The happiest thing is that when we meet people again, they appreciate and trust us, and that has helped us a lot with the mobilization.

In addition, I have been getting recognition from my commune as well as from the Communist Party. We needed to make a road. I am a head of WU so I understand well the program. Then I also select one opportunity – for the hamlet to complete that road. I just give my advice. Whether we can make it or not depends very much on the support of people. Actually, my role is quite significant. As I mentioned, thanks to join CHOBA, I have chance to gain experience, skillfully work on mobilization, get recognition from local authorities, then my voice is being heard and I get more assignments from higher levels.”

(VWU volunteer, Interview, 14 June, 2017, Hoa Binh Commune, Hoa Binh Province).

Box 2: Second CHOBA pathway leading to individual empowerment



“I was taught with the mobilizing skills and I have attended [CHOBA] training courses. I feel better, I knew nothing at the beginning. Previously, I was afraid to contact other people. Now I am part of the public. I enjoy and prefer contact with other people.

Before, when visiting to each household, they said they are bored to see my face there, they complain and are not happy about me convincing or telling them to do this and that. I was very sad and wondered why I was doing this but gradually I feel okay and continued trying. At that time, I was not experienced or used to being complained about and they talked straight away out to me.

After I was successful with some households, people found that I was working hard and they like me, they respect me. I help people earn 560k for each case of a latrine built, people thank me, I find myself doing helpful and meaningful work. The attitude of the hamlet people is better towards me, which makes me more confident. Not only the WU sisters but also men themselves, it encourages me, I try to do better.

My hamlet sometimes asks about some concerns, I feel proud of myself. I give advice to people, I feel I am confident and prestigious to people.”

(VWU volunteer, Interview, 03 July, 2017, Long Thoi Commune, Tra Vinh Province)

Box 3: Third CHOBA pathway leading to individual empowerment



“It was quite difficult at the beginning because my husband often complained that I go out a lot and I do not take care of the family’s stuff but take care of others’. But I persuade my husband gradually, then my husband and his family create favourable conditions for me. Before it was

quite difficult, I have to tell them any time I want to go out. When there are such things that I can do, people treat me normally, and create favourable conditions for me.

My mother in law also said that “I feel very proud about [volunteer’s name]”. When I got married, my mother in law is often the one who manages the finance. And it is quite popular that there is not much trust among mother in law and daughter in law. However, since my participation in the social work, in CHOBA project, I have my own voice and my mother in law also trusts me. She allows me to make decisions in terms of financial issues or any other things. For example, when I decided to open a general store, before I had to ask for permission of my mother in law but this time, she said that we have been mature then we can go ahead if we feel we can. She let us make the decision by ourselves, we just need to ask her in case there is any big issue. I see that my mother in law also trusts me.”

(VWU volunteer, Interview, 03 July, 2017, Long Thoi Commune, Tra Vinh Province)

Negative experiences resulting from engagement with CHOBA

It is important to note that some women (five out of 20) commented on some drawbacks or negative aspects of their involvement in CHOBA. Of these, four also reported at least one positive gender outcome which suggests that positive and negative experiences co-existed. One volunteer reported that the income she gained from the project was not much, due to the small number of households in her village. In the case of the other four volunteers, they reported on time pressures associated with working in CHOBA and described the challenge of organising their time around other duties and on their families. This was due to the travel required to reach all households in the village and the need to repeat household visits. One woman reported that:

“It is difficult. The households are located far away from each other, on different hills. I have to leave my housework behind to visit to mobilize them. For example, I try to go at noon, sometimes I didn’t come home in time and the paddy I spread on the ground would get wet.” (Interview, Hop Chau Commune, 12 June, 2017).

3.1.3 Summary of evidence of individual empowerment and CHOBA’s contribution

In keeping with the definition of individual empowerment used in this research (see section 2.4) which also informed the key categories used to present the research findings in this section, Table 5 below provides a synthesis of the evidence showing the extent of individual empowerment uncovered and CHOBA’s main contribution to this. It also includes a summary of negative experiences reported by several VWU volunteers.

Table 5: Synthesis of evidence of individual empowerment and CHOBA's contribution

Indicator of individual empowerment	Evidence from the research	Main contribution of CHOBA
<i>Increased self-confidence</i>	<p>12 out of 20 VWU volunteers (60%) reported an increase in self-confidence as a result of their involvement in CHOBA.</p> <p>Confidence was reported by VWU volunteers as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greater self-worth • communication and speaking in public 	<p>Knowledge gained through CHOBA, hands-on experience in CHOBA mobilisation through household visits and proven ability to assist people in the community with loans and latrine installation led to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased confidence to communicate • increased confidence and comfort to interact and work with people

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feeling confident in knowledge and ability • feeling loved and respected • feeling a greater level of influence • feeling supported in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased confidence to perform other tasks • greater connections and increased confidence to maintain these.
<i>Positive changes in household roles and relations</i>	<p>Nine out of 20 volunteers (45%) reported that their roles and relationships at home and with their families had changed for the better as a result of their involvement in CHOBA.</p> <p>Positive changes in roles and relationships were reported as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greater support from husbands and other family members • greater love, understanding, respect and trust from families • greater voice and agency at home • husbands listening and following • greater decision-making role in the home. 	<p>Seeing increased appreciation and trust shown by the community encouraged husbands to listen to and follow their wives.</p> <p>Due to more compliments given by neighbours, family members showed more trust in the volunteers which gave them greater independence to make decisions.</p>
<i>Positive changes in roles and increased status in the community</i>	<p>14 out of 20 volunteers (70%) reported an increase in their status in the community.</p> <p>Increased status in the community was reported as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • greater respect and appreciation from the community; • increased ability and agency to perform other roles and work in the community; • increased trust and confidence from the community; • greater recognition of volunteers from leaders and Women's Union superiors; • a feeling of being more persuasive with community. 	<p>Learning skills and accumulating experience led to successful mobilisation and positive benefits for households, contributing to increased recognition, greater voice and more roles in the community for volunteers.</p> <p>Women had the opportunity to meet people and therefore learned about their important issues to raise to leaders.</p> <p>Connections gained through household mobilisation made other tasks and responsibilities easier for women.</p> <p>Through their successful work in CHOBA, women gained motivation and an openness to take on other tasks on different issues</p>
<i>Increased access to educational and economic opportunities</i>	<p>One volunteer out of 20 (5%) reported an increase in her economic opportunities.</p>	<p>Persuasion and mobilisations skills gained through CHOBA were applicable to employment in other areas (in this case, as an insurance dealer).</p>

<p><i>Negative experiences resulting from engagement with CHOBA</i></p>	<p>Five out of 20 volunteers (25%) reported drawbacks or negative aspects of their involvement in CHOBA (four out of 20 volunteers (20%) reported both positive and negative experiences). These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • income from the role was small • time pressures and balancing other duties in families • travel required to reach all households and need to repeat household visits. 	<p>The role that VWU volunteers took on in the CHOBA program was required significant investments of time, including travel to cover large areas and persistent and repeated household visits to persuade households and assist with loan applications in order to achieve latrine coverage. The incentive from the program (USD2 per latrine) was less beneficial in cases where less latrines were built (due to the small number of households in a village or where there were 'difficult' households as reported by VWU volunteers).</p>
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3.1.4 Implications for EMW efforts to influence positive gender change at the individual level

The research has found sufficient evidence to suggest that most VWU volunteers experienced empowerment as a result of their work in CHOBA. This section has provided an overview of this evidence, showing that most of the volunteers who participated in the research (70%) experienced empowerment outcomes in the form of increased self-confidence, improved roles and relationships and/or increased status in the community, at both household and community level. Most of the Volunteers (70%) could also link these experiences back to their involvement in the CHOBA program.

The research has found sufficient evidence to suggest that most VWU volunteers experienced empowerment as a result of their work in CHOBA.

Although it was not the initial intention of the CHOBA program to contribute to empowerment of the VWU volunteers, rather, the program focussed on achieving sanitation outcomes, there were certain elements within the program which led to women experiencing gender equality outcomes. Practical, technical and targeted training provided women with a systematic approach to mobilisation which they then put into practice, gaining experience of presenting themselves to households. This increased their confidence to speak and interact publicly. The successes of the program in achieving significant latrine coverage and utilising VBSP loans led to respect from the community for the work of the VWU volunteers. Several volunteers also reported on the challenge they experienced through CHOBA in managing their time and the impact of the time-intensive work on their other duties and on their families.

3.2 Contribution of CHOBA to the status and influence of the Women's Union as an institution in the sanitation sector and beyond

The research found an increase in the status and level of influence of the VWU in the sanitation sector at the commune and provincial level.

Data was analysed using two categories of influence as defined in section 2.4:

1. positive change in the roles of the VWU at different levels
2. increased influence of the VWU over decisions and policy in the sanitation sector.

This section of the report provides an overview of what this increase in influence entailed and how it was found to link back to the CHOBA program, structured around three levels; commune, province and central. A synthesis of the findings is provided in Table 6.

3.2.1 Increased influence at commune level

New or changed roles for the VWU at commune level

At the commune level, four out of 12 stakeholders reported examples of new or changed roles for the VWU in the sanitation sector. The links between examples provided and the WU role in CHOBA were quite clear as demonstrated by the findings reported here.

Examples of positive changes in roles or new roles for the VWU at commune level were mostly reported by non-WU stakeholders, such as those from the Commune People's Committee or Commune Health Stations. In three of the four communes, examples were either reported by both VWU and non-VWU stakeholders, or only by non-WU stakeholders. This suggests that the changes in roles for VWU were recognised clearly by non-VWU stakeholders at the commune level. No examples of new roles for the VWU were reported by the three stakeholders interviewed in Long Duc Commune.

In Hoa Binh Commune, reported examples of changed roles for the VWU included being assigned to synthesise data on hygienic latrine coverage and supporting the health sector with data verification on latrine coverage as well as continuing to mobilise households towards the Commune's latrine targets (after CHOBA had ended) based on targets set by the health sector.

WU became a key actor (for mobilising) as part of the Commune resolution on its sanitation and environment program, which included hygienic latrines coverage. As reported, CHOBA affirmed the VWU role and trust in its organisational and implementation capacity increased.

In Hop Chau Commune, reported examples included that the commune leaders changed their view of VWU and gained more confidence in its mobilisation skills so therefore assigned more tasks. VWU became a key actor (for mobilising) as part of the Commune resolution on its sanitation and environment program, which included hygienic latrines coverage. As reported, CHOBA affirmed the VWU role and trust in its organisational and implementation capacity increased.

In Long Thoi Commune, reported examples included that the Commune People's Committee (CPC) showed more trust in VWU and determined that WU were capable of implementing the environment target in the New Rural Development program (NRD) (under target 17).

Influence of VWU in decision-making at commune level

At the commune level, two out of 12 research participants reported examples of VWU influence over decision-making in the sanitation sector. Both of these were reported in Hoa Binh Commune, one by a VWU stakeholder and the other by a non-VWU stakeholder. Both examples had a strong link back to CHOBA as the findings reported here show.

Due to its achievements through CHOBA, people, local authorities and leaders showed more support for the VWU and its recommendations had influence, for example a suggestion to introduce trollies for garbage collection.

One example reported was that the VWU is now a member of the Commune project management board of the NRD and provides input and recommendations to local plans. Due to its achievements through CHOBA, people, local authorities and leaders showed more support for the VWU and its recommendations had influence, for example a suggestion to introduce trollies for garbage collection.

Another example reported was that WU was asked for advice on sanitation and environment issues including through the NRD. This stakeholder reported that;

Now the commune is trying to keep to sanitation and environment targets. WU has also been assigned to continue to mobilize so that 100 percent of households have latrines, therefore, they have a decisive role in this field (Interview, Hoa Binh Commune, 14 June, 2017).

3.2.2 Increased influence at provincial level

New or changed roles for the VWU at provincial level

At the provincial level, five out of seven stakeholders reported examples of new roles for the VWU as a result of CHOBA. Three of the four stakeholders in Hoa Binh Province reported examples, compared to one out of three stakeholders in Tra Vinh Province.

The WU provincial level stakeholders in Hoa Binh Province reported new roles such as the Provincial People's Committee (PPC) showing more trust in the WU and providing more budget support, after the VWU was able to present clear plans with targets and road maps. VWU were assigned more responsibilities in NRD and 'city of civilisation' programs. VWU were also recognised for its quality surveying of latrines and clean water which resulted in NGO Child Fund assigning new sanitation and environment responsibilities to VWU. Reported changes were due to VWU's proven ability to produce specific results in CHOBA rather than performing general communication and mobilisation as it had previously. VWU had proven that it could take a more strategic approach, working towards specific targets with clear indicators.

In Tra Vinh Province, the example reported by the WU stakeholder was that the VWU had successfully implemented CHOBA so was invited to the management Board for environmental protection and assigned a sector within this.

There was an overall strong link between reported examples of new roles for the VWU and the CHOBA program. Only one example was reported by a non-VWU stakeholder, regarding VWU being the leading organisation for managing VBSP loans for clean water, sanitation and environment. The contribution of CHOBA to this new role was not entirely clear from the stakeholder's response. This suggests that non-VWU stakeholders were less able to see new roles for the VWU at the Provincial level and that the WU had a greater number of new roles in Hoa Binh Province than it did in Tra Vinh Province.

Influence of VWU over decision-making at provincial level

Three out of three stakeholders in Tra Vinh Province reported examples of increased influence over decision-making in the sanitation sector and two out of four stakeholders in Hoa Binh Province reported such examples. In both Provinces, the examples were reported

by VWU stakeholders as well as non-VWU stakeholders which shows that this influence was recognised by those outside the VWU at Provincial level.

In Hoa Binh, the examples reported included that the Preventive Medicine Center and the World Bank consulted the PWU on a World Bank WASH program in order to coordinate with CHOBA 2.¹² Another example reported, is that the VWU lobbied Provincial leaders to provide extra subsidies for households in the project districts to build latrines.¹³ The result of this lobbying was written agreements in two districts and verbal agreements in another two districts to provide the additional finance. The VWU has also worked with VBSP to improve survey forms, making them more appropriate and easy to use.

In Tra Vinh Province, all stakeholders interviewed shared examples of increased VWU influence. One example shared was that the VWU successfully lobbied for more support from provincial leaders (PPC) to achieve CHOBA latrine coverage targets. Non-VWU stakeholders reported that the VWU presented innovations and recommendations to the PPC, and in 2016, successfully lobbied for 77 billion VND (around 3.3 million USD) in household latrine loans (compared to 1 billion VND in 2012). Interviewees suggested that the VWU are trusted because of their systematic approach to implementation. Another non-VWU stakeholder reported that CHOBA and the effectiveness of VWU mobilisation in Tra Vinh, led to ongoing budget allocation and ongoing coordination with PPMC for mobilisation and Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS).

3.2.3 Increased influence at central level

It is useful to preface the following section with some context around programs and actors in the sanitation sector.

The government's sanitation strategy was developed in 2000 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), and follows the National Rural Clean Water Supply and Sanitation Strategy to 2020. It was updated in 2011 by MARD (prior to implementation of CHOBA). In 2012, responsibility for rural sanitation was transferred from MARD to the Ministry of Health (MOH).

In order to implement the national WASH strategy, three National Target Programs for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (NTP) were implemented from 2000 to 2015. These programs were co-financed by the GoV with major bilateral support. The NTPs prioritised investment in water supply over sanitation. Following the end of NTP3 in December 2015, major bilateral support was no longer available for rural WASH. In 2016, the government announced a national initiative named the New Rural Development Program (NRD), which includes 19 indicators, one of which is access to sanitation. WASH related indicators were not allocated budget support until late 2017, when around 1.2 trillion VND¹⁴ was committed to rural water and waste management in coastal and island difficult areas¹⁵.

The role of VWU on these national steering committees/boards is helpful to consider. VWU was included as a member of the NTP3 project management board in 2013 and was included as a member of the NRD steering committee from its inception. These bodies have been responsible for implementation rather than policy development. However, it can be argued that the extent of responsibility and budget assigned to each institution on the board/committee reflects a perception of their value by the most senior levels of government. Furthermore, these institutions have an opportunity to exert influence through exercising their mandate.

New or changed roles for the VWU at central level

¹² CHOBA 2 is a commercial sanitation program run by EMW, aimed at developing a sustainable sanitation enterprise managed by the Women's Union.

¹³ Hoa Binh PPC agreed to provide USD 15 per constructed latrine

¹⁴ Decision 712/QĐ-TTg dated 25 May 2017

¹⁵ At the time of publication, there was no budget earmarked for sanitation in the NRD.

Three out of four stakeholders at the central level reported that CHOBA had led to new roles for the VWU. However, tangible links between new roles and the VWU involvement in CHOBA were less clear at this level compared with the provincial and commune levels.

Examples of new roles given to the VWU reported at Central level suggest that within CHOBA itself, the WU had a more active and broader role, with clear targets, budget and resources. The VWU stakeholder at Central level reported that of the six unions in Vietnam, the VWU was the only one allowed to participate in the board for the NRD.

Another stakeholder at central level reported that whereas the VWU had not been included in the first Standing Committee for the Government's National Sanitation Target Program (NTP 1) it was then invited to play a more active role and in the NTP 2 and 3 for which it was provided with a separate budget line to implement communication activities, capacity building and development of models.

Influence of VWU over decision-making at central level

No stakeholders at the central level (out of four) reported clear examples of an increase in the influence of the VWU over decision-making at the central level. This finding is not entirely surprising given the long-term nature of policy change at the national level in Vietnam, as compared to the province or commune level, where the VWU did demonstrate influence as reported above. It is also important to consider the scale of the CHOBA program, which took place in 500 communes (5% of the total number of communes in Vietnam), across 10 Provinces (out of 58). Therefore, its direct impact, through the VWU, on national sanitation policy and programs is expected to be minimal.

Synthesis of findings on increased institutional influence of the VWU

Of the 23 stakeholders who were interviewed, 18 reported new roles or increased influence of the VWU as a result of CHOBA, as reported above. Table 6 provides a synthesis of these findings.

Table 6: Synthesis of findings on increased institutional influence of the VWU

Level	Stakeholders reporting increased VWU influence	Contribution of CHOBA to increased VWU influence
COMMUNE	<p>6 out of 12 (50%) stakeholders reported examples of increased influence (this included three out of four VWU stakeholders and three out of eight other stakeholders).</p> <p>Key examples included: <i>New roles:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VWU was asked to work towards latrine coverage targets set by the health sector as well as other targets in the commune sanitation and environment program • VWU was assigned data management tasks in the health sector • local authorities and leaders showed VWU more support. <p><i>Influence over decisions:</i></p>	<p>Through CHOBA, VWU proved its ability to manage accurate data on latrine coverage.</p> <p>Through CHOBA, VWU proved to be highly skilled in mobilisation which changed the leaders' view of it.</p> <p>Due to VWU achievements regarding latrine coverage in CHOBA, local authorities and leaders showed it more support.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VWU recommendations now have influence for example, through the Commune project management board of the NRD. 	
PROVINCE	<p>6 out of 7 (86%) stakeholders reported examples of increased influence (this included three out of three VWU stakeholders and three out of four other stakeholders).</p> <p>Key examples included: <i>New roles:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased budget support for VWU • more responsibilities in NRD and 'city of civilisation' programs • Child Fund assigned new sanitation and environment responsibilities to WU. <p><i>Influence over decisions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World Bank consulted the VWU on WASH program • WU successfully lobbied Provincial leaders for extra subsidies for households to build latrines • PPC took on VWU innovations and recommendations • VWU successfully lobbied for 77 billion VND in loans for households • ongoing budget allocation and coordination with PPMC for mobilisation and Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS). 	<p>Through CHOBA, VWU proved its ability to produce specific results thanks to their roles as credit sale agents and providing consumer rebates to poor and near poor households (as opposed to general communication and mobilisation as it had previously).</p> <p>Others recognised its ability to work towards specific targets with clear indicators through CHOBA.</p> <p>VWU was trusted because of its systematic implementation of CHOBA and the effectiveness of its mobilisation.</p>

3.2.4 Increased respect and recognition for the VWU

Three additional stakeholders (who did not also report examples of new roles or influence outlined above) reported examples which suggested a greater respect and recognition for the VWU. These don't necessarily indicate increased influence, but do suggest an increase in the status of the VWU due to its work and success in CHOBA.

One example shared by a Commune-level health sector stakeholder describes this well:

"Before, they [VWU] just did mobilization, communication and consultation but did not have any specific activities because there was no budget. Since 2014, there is the CHOBA project and people have a little money and felt encourage People built more hygienic latrines, therefore, the role of the VWU has also increased. I see that they have changed a lot, there are more meetings, there are more conferences in villages. VWU also has a good impact on the sanitation movement. The reason is that within CHOBA project, they worked directly with people. And people also feel encouraged. They evaluate that the role of the WU is better. If the WU is mentioned, people will go to the meetings." (Interview, June 2017).

3.2.5 VWU roles extending beyond the sanitation sector

Although the research set out to examine the extent to which CHOBA contributed to an increased level of influence of the VWU as an institution in the sanitation sector, it also uncovered some examples of increased VWU influence beyond sanitation, in other areas of rural development. VWU stakeholders were asked specifically about this, and three (out of eight) interviewees provided examples. Additionally, four non-VWU stakeholders (out of 15) also volunteered such examples.

At the commune level, in Hoa Binh, the VWU was given a platform at meetings and conferences about gender equality (perceived by the respondents to be an increased role) and had also been given priority in policies regarding loans. The VWU had also used mobilisation models similar to CHOBA, for other initiatives regarding 'social evils' to scale up to five villages. Another stakeholder reported that the role of the VWU had shifted to other sectors such as collecting garbage and environmental issues, as had also been reported at provincial level. In Long Duc commune, the VWU had mobilised households to apply for no-interest, rotating loans to raise animals and sell products (as well as building latrines). In Long Thoi Commune, reported examples included that VWU gained prestige and the commune assigned more activities to the VWU like planting trees and lighting roads.

Two examples were provided at the provincial level, one from Hoa Binh and one from Tra Vinh. In Tra Vinh Province, the VWU had been assigned tasks in the environmental protection field in garbage management (sorting and selling rubbish). In Hoa Binh Province, the VWU had used mobilisation skills to bring about very impressive results in a road construction project which required strong persuasion with households to contribute funds or land and to move their walls of their houses to build the road.

3.2.6 Impacts of CHOBA on responsiveness of the Vietnam's sanitation program to the needs of women and girls

In terms of policy, the National Rural Clean Water Supply and Sanitation Strategy 2000 to 2020 mentions the importance of reaching women through information and education campaigns, ensuing equal participation of women and men in community organisation and ensuring that women play important roles in implementation of this Strategy at the lowest administrative level.¹⁶ This research did not uncover examples of increased responsiveness of the Government of Vietnam's sanitation program to the needs of women and girls, through policy initiatives or implementation, as compared to before the implementation of CHOBA. This is not to say that CHOBA itself did not make considerable gains in making sanitation facilities more responsive to women's needs and preferences. A related study (Ljung and Hill, 2017), found that key elements of the CHOBA program empowered women and gave them a greater say in the household's decision to install a new latrine and, as a result, the sanitation facilities were more responsive to women's needs and preferences.

3.2.7 Implications for EMW partnership with the VWU

At the commune and provincial levels, there is considerable evidence showing that the VWU influence in the sanitation sector, in the form of new roles or influence over decision-making at the province and commune levels, increased as a result of its involvement in the CHOBA program. The decentralised nature of Vietnam's sanitation program means that key actors in charge of budgets and programming are the Provincial People's Committees, which makes this finding significant.

¹⁶ Government of Vietnam (2000), *National Rural Clean Water Supply and Sanitation Strategy up to 2020*, August 2000.

The examples from the Commune and Provincial levels indicate that the VWU gained a greater voice and role because the institution had proven its ability to implement a complex, results-based program such as CHOBA. Its particular skills in mobilisation, facilitation of loans, data management and program implementation which were honed through CHOBA, were recognised by stakeholders in the sanitation sector. It was therefore assigned new roles and tasks, including several beyond the sanitation sector in rural development more broadly. The VWU was also invited to provide input into decision-making or successfully advocated to leaders and decision-makers for certain commitments or approaches.

At the central level, the research showed that this influence is less clear. Three examples of new roles for the VWU at the central level were reported, however, the contribution of CHOBA to such changes cannot be clearly established. Furthermore, no examples of VWU increased influence over decision-making were reported at the central level.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the key findings of the research and are designed to inform the design, monitoring and evaluation of programs similar to CHOBA, implemented by EMW or other similar agencies in the context of Vietnam.

Recommendation	Relevant evidence and implications from the research
<p>1. It is recommended that EMW continue to emphasise practical skills, technical information and hands-on experience in training programs for VWU volunteers.</p> <p>Other agencies should also consider such approaches which were found to be empowering for women and led to positive gender equality outcomes such as increased self-confidence.</p>	<p>The research found that CHOBA training contributed to gender equality outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 out of 20 VWU volunteers (60%) reported an increase in self-confidence, which was linked to CHOBA training. Topics of training included latrine construction (traditionally a male field), persuasive communication techniques, loan facilitation, technical information about benefits of latrine coverage.
<p>2. EMW should continue to recruit female volunteers from communities that the programs are being implemented in, to maximise positive gender equality outcomes such as increased status in the community, ability to take on new roles in the community and increased respect and support from family.</p> <p>Other agencies, whether working in partnership with the VWU or other partners in similar contexts, should also look to work with women from communities in which programs are being implemented, so that the women are acknowledged for their contributions by their families, friends and broader community, as a result of the benefits of the program and their work being evident.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 out of 20 volunteers (70%) reported an increase in their status in the community which was due largely to successful mobilisation contributing to increased recognition, greater voice and more roles in the community. Through their successful work in CHOBA, women gained motivation and an openness to take on other tasks on different issues. • 9 out of 20 volunteers (45%) reported that their roles and relationships at home and with their families had changed for the better as a result of family members seeing the community show increased appreciation and trust to the volunteers.
<p>3. EMW can draw on the research findings from this study to design future programs which engage VWU volunteers. For example, recognising the increased status experienced by the VWU at village, commune and provincial levels, EMW could develop and incorporate activities which further</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most common positive gender outcome experienced by VWU volunteers was increased status in the community which was largely a result of recognition by the community and leaders' of the successful outcomes of CHOBA and the VWU's clear role in achieving those.

<p>enhance this, such as more formal recognition ceremonies for the VWU or producing media outputs profiling VWU volunteers' achievements.</p>	
<p>4. EMW should utilise the findings of this research to design M&E processes and tools, appropriate for tracking gender equality outcomes alongside sanitation outcomes achieved through its program and partnership models. By incorporating gender equality considerations/indicators and qualitative information at the baseline, throughout the program implementation, and at the end of a program, EMW will be better placed to report on the kinds of gender equality outcomes identified in this study in a more meaningful way during implementation, and therefore supporting adaptive management approaches which are responsive to the experiences (positive and negative) of implementing partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This research was designed in the absence of EMW pre-defined indicators for tracking gender equality outcomes in the CHOBA program. The research results therefore serve as a baseline of positive (and negative) outcomes achieved through CHOBA and the mechanisms within CHOBA that contributed to these. • The research found that sanitation and gender outcomes achieved within the CHOBA program were mutually reinforcing in some respects. For example, where VWU volunteers were recognised for reaching sanitation targets, this contributed to both individual and institutional empowerment. • All development interventions affect women and men differently, but this research showed that achieving WASH-related outcomes can also support achievement of gender equality outcomes. It is important to see gender equality outcomes and WASH outcomes (or in this case, sanitation outcomes) as dual aims of programs such as CHOBA.
<p>5. EMW needs to conduct a careful assessment of potential negative impacts (unintended consequences) of volunteers' involvement in program implementation at the design stage and develop mitigation strategies in collaboration with the partner institutions (VWU). This may include, for example, time commitments and travel requirements. Furthermore, while informal opportunities were offered during the program for volunteers to provide feedback on their achievements, a formal feedback mechanism could be incorporated, particularly for volunteers to raise concerns. If concerns are raised, mitigation strategies can be developed over the course of program implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five out of 20 volunteers (25%) reported drawbacks or negative aspects of their involvement in CHOBA including significant investments of time, travel to cover large areas and persistent and repeated household visits required to persuade households and assist with loan applications in order to achieve latrine coverage targets. • It should be noted that these positive gender equality outcomes uncovered in this research were closely linked to the success of the CHOBA program in achieving latrine coverage. Conversely, if a program had negative impacts or few successful outcomes, this may have a negative impact on women's roles and status in their communities and homes.
<p>6. EMW should continue to engage with the VWU with the explicit intention of contributing to individual and institutional</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 out of 23 (78%) stakeholders reported new roles or increased influence of the VWU as a result of CHOBA. This

<p>empowerment in Vietnam. This requires an assessment of VWU capacity and capabilities, and careful decisions about what programs will maximise VWU skills and allow volunteers and members to participate in meaningful and empowering ways.</p>	<p>was dependent upon CHOBA's achievement in terms of concrete program outputs and the positive benefits of sanitation coverage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive gender equality outcomes experienced by the VWU (individually and institutionally) were closely linked to the success of CHOBA. Conversely, if a program had negative impacts or few successful outcomes, this may have a negative impact on women's roles and status in their communities and homes and the roles and influence of the VWU as an institution.
<p>7. If EMW's intention is to empower the VWU as an institution at the central level, it will need an explicit strategy for doing so. EMW and DFAT have conducted advocacy on behalf of the WU at numerous events, and the institutional arrangements at provincial and commune level creating 'champion' provinces does contribute to this. However, EMW could provide more support for the VWU to communicate and advocate around its achievements with a view to increasing VWU influence and voice at the central level. A collaborative analysis (with the VWU) of the interests, strategy and capacity of the VWU with respect to rural sanitation at the Central level will help to frame such a strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The research did find substantial examples of increased influence of the VWU over decision-making processes at the central level. • The research did not investigate the broader strategic interests of the VWU and the relative importance of rural sanitation in its future overarching strategy.
<p>8. When recruiting volunteers for any of its programs EMW should consider intersectionality wherever possible. Age, ethnicity, wealth, education and relative status of volunteers in the community should be taken into account in order to ensure that certain groups of women are not being excluded from opportunities to participate in a potentially empowering program.</p> <p>In terms of M&E, when tracking individual empowerment outcomes experienced by volunteers, EMW should disaggregate data by these same factors in order to contextualise results.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of the VWU volunteers who took part in the CHOBA program already held positions of authority within the VWU at the village level. This was identified as a limitation for this research and findings should be viewed in light of the existing positions of respect that members of the VWU sampled in this research already enjoyed.
<p>9. This evaluation provides evidence of the mutually beneficial and reinforcing aims of improved WASH and gender equality.</p>	

<p>Therefore, evaluations such as this can be used to advocate at the international level (with donors), national level (Central government) through to the provincial and commune levels to demonstrate the achievements of programs such as CHOBA and call for funding and policy development wherever possible.</p>	
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5 CONCLUSION

The research uncovered considerable indications of women's empowerment within the Vietnam Women's Union at individual and institutional levels as a result of the partnership between EMW and VWU on the CHOBA program.

CHOBA succeeded in contributing to women's empowerment at an individual level, as demonstrated by evidence from the VWU Volunteers at the village level. Women involved in CHOBA at the village level experienced empowerment primarily in the form of increased status in their community, and also in terms of increased self-confidence and positive changes in roles and relationships in their households. The fact that CHOBA was a results-based program, and provided VWU volunteers with financial tools such as loans and rebates for poor households, seems to have been important factors influencing this positive outcome.

CHOBA succeeded in supporting the VWU as an institution to gain new roles and influence in the sanitation sector at provincial and commune levels. This wasn't in the form of direct decision-making or policy input. Rather, the VWU were given new roles and responsibilities and increased influence over implementation of sanitation activities and targets at provincial and commune level. There was also evidence that VWU capacity to implement a complex and results-based program using strategic mobilisation and loan facilitation techniques was recognised by political stakeholders.

At the Central level, the research did not uncover a strong contribution of CHOBA to increased VWU influence over national sanitation policy. However, it did reveal new roles for the VWU in the sanitation sector. The research did not uncover any evidence of a VWU contribution to more gender responsive programming and policy design at the Central level. This finding, however, should be viewed in light of the complex policy-making environment at the central level and the fact that CHOBA activities were concentrated at commune and provincial levels.

EMW's decision to partner with the VWU has proven to yield positive results in terms of individual empowerment of VWU volunteers at village level, and institutional status and influence of the VWU at Commune and Province levels (to varying degrees). For this reason, recommendations have been provided to guide EMW towards continuing the good practices that the research highlighted, whilst paying attention to some areas for improvement and most importantly, towards finding strong methods to monitor and evaluate the gender equality outcomes being achieved alongside sanitation outcomes in its programs.

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