

Women-Led Output-Based Aid: Vietnam

Briefing Note for Annual Conference – December 2021

Women-Led Output-Based Aid (WOBA) Vietnam is a program designed and implemented by East Meets West (EMW) to address challenges and inequities in Vietnam’s rural water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector.

WOBA is funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through the Water for Women Fund over 4.5 years (June 2018 to December 2022) with a total budget of 5.7 million Australian dollars.

WOBA has two objectives: (i) increase access to equitable (WASH services, especially among marginalized community members; (ii) improve gender equality and social inclusion.

WOBA is implemented using output-based subsidy scheme in five rural provinces: Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Ben Tre.

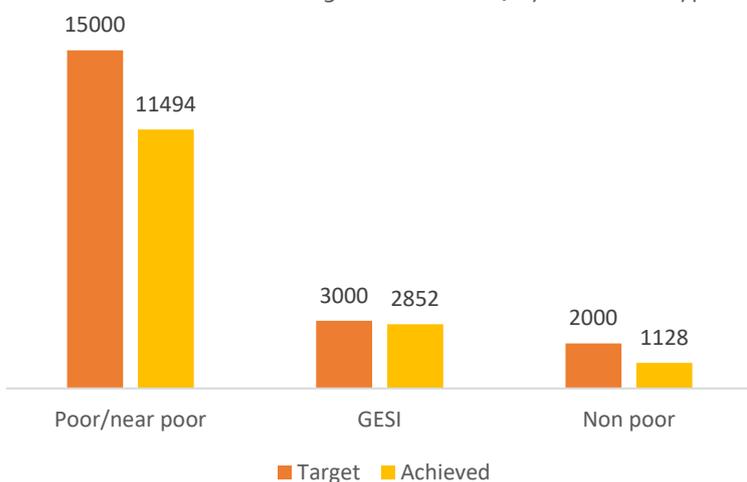
Key Program Activities

- Partner with and deliver training for Vietnam’s WASH service authorities and service providers at the national, provincial, commune levels
- Partner with and deliver training for private sector WASH to deliver WASH services, particularly for marginalized communities in rural Vietnam.
- Build capacity and profile of Vietnam Women’s Union (WU) members at national and provincial levels to empower them to lead, coordinate, and mobilize households construct hygienic latrines and connect to clean water, and promote hygienic practices.
- Organize and facilitate learning workshops with partners and stakeholders to share insights, exchange knowledge, and advocate inclusive WASH services in Vietnam.

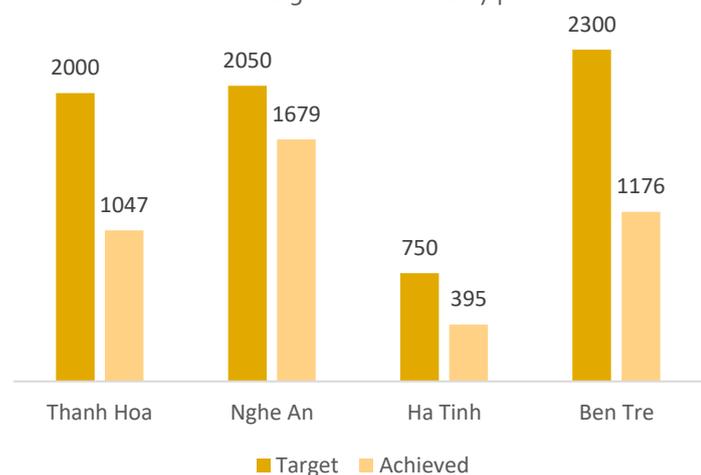
WASH results as of December 2021

- 15,474 hygienic latrines constructed (77% of target of 20000)
- 4,297 households connected to piped water (60% of target of 7,100)
- 3,056 handwashing devices distributed to kindergartens, health stations and GESI households; 200 plastic water tanks to households
- Five private water operators and more than 60 private sanitation suppliers have partnered with WOBA

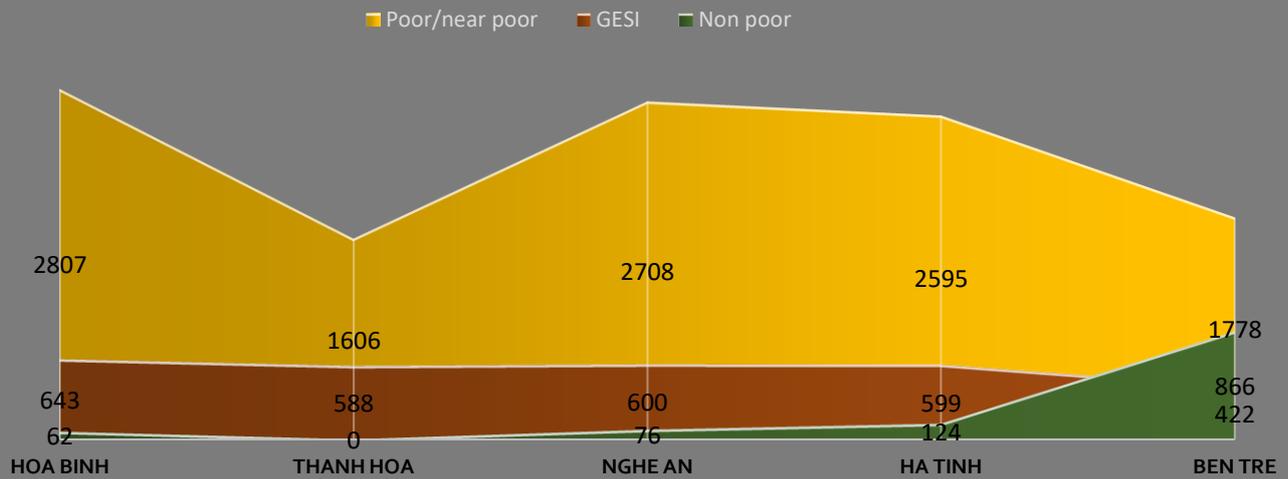
Latrine targets vs achieved, by household types



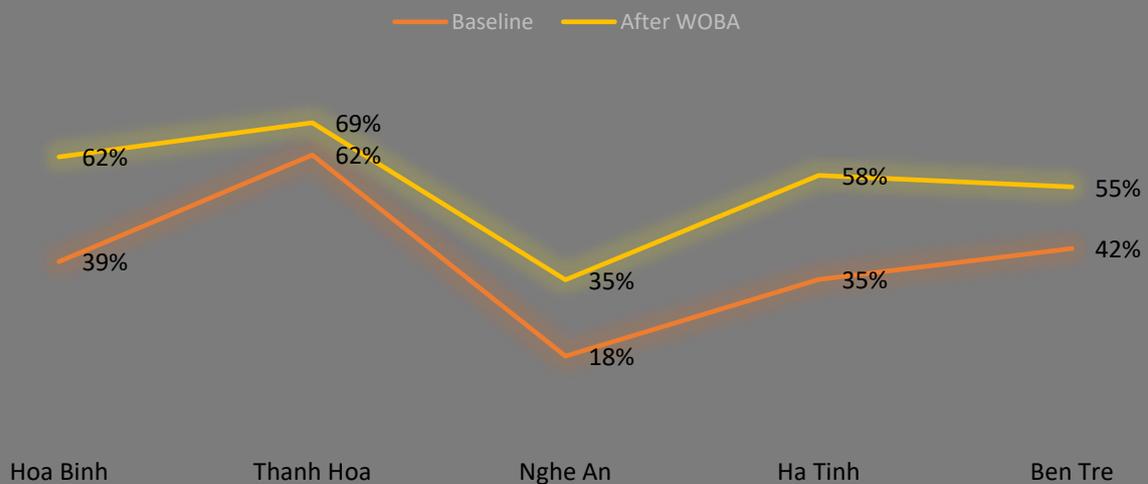
Water connection target vs achieved by province



Completed latrines by household types and provinces



Sanitation coverage improvement



Pilot of Faecal Sludge Management (FSM)

WOBA FSM pilot aims to build demand and raise awareness about the importance of safe pit emptying in the service area, develop a market coordination mechanism and enforce both private and public desludging truck enterprises to dispose sludge in the treatment plant, and build capacity for treatment plant operators, and strengthen the regulatory environment, and local government capacity for city-wide management.

Achievements to date:

- Handover of the treatment plant to Ben Tre city's People's Committee in April 2021
- Meeting held in August 2021 in which three options for FSM service cost calculation was proposed for stakeholders to consider.
- A construction team established by Ben Tre city government with the participation of relevant departments and agencies: Department of Construction, Department of Finance, Ben Tre urban project joint stock company to calculate cost structure for FSM.
- task force established to collect data on the cost of FSM service including emptying, transporting and treatment, and the SOP is being drafted.
- 01 document about decision and document about regulations on management FSM service (collect, transport, and treatment fecal sludge of septic tank) in Ben Tre city drafted and considered to apply. When these regulations are approved, private units will have the opportunity to engage and discharge in the treatment plant.
- Draft of handbook, and draft of animation video about FSM completed and prepared for printing and reviewing the final round. When finalised, these communication materials will be provided to the WU to support their raising awareness activities in Ben Tre city about FSM in Ben Tre city.

Pilot of climate resilient water safety plan

The pilot of climate resilient Water Safety Planning is implemented through the same partnership structure of WOBA and target households (GESI and poor). To date, PCERWASS and private water operators in Nghe An and Ben Tre have completed the pilot CRWSP.

Issues identified:

- Water shortage in the dry season requires measures to improve the supply.
- Water pollution due to various types of waste is a problem that needs to be addressed in Nghe An.
- Water pollution due to salinity is the biggest problem in Ben Tre as well as many other provinces in the Mekong Delta.

Solutions proposed:

- Improve water supply capacity by enhancing raw water supply capacity from upstream (e.g Long Thanh scheme), possibly through the addition of upstream pumping stations
- Plan and mobilise the community to store water in dry season to reduce pressure on suppliers.
- Promote exemplary environmental Women's Union, environmental organisations
- Coordinate with the irrigation department to implement optimal water collection process, in accordance with the operating cycle of the plant
- Research and develop water production and supply scenarios for different levels of salinity and corresponding conventional and desalination treatment to meet the water needs of the local community
- Develop technical capacity of water schemes in assessing risks and hazards and developing improvement plans.



Research on the impact of WOBA's COVID 19 response

A study was conducted after EMW completed the implementation of the first phase of the COVID-19 Response project. The aim of the study is to understand the extent to which distribution of hand washing stations and water tanks, and the WU's hygiene promotion activities has influenced the knowledge, attitude and hygiene behaviour of households and staff at commune health centres and kindergartens in two provinces in rural Vietnam. Employing a case study approach in two provinces, the study surveyed 372 households, health staff, and kindergarten personnel, followed by structured interviews with 12 WU member.

The findings suggest that there was a strong sense of morality among the WU members who viewed their handwashing promotion as a collective duty to ensure the health and wellbeing of their community. They promoted handwashing to prevent COVID-19 as part of the WU's propaganda mandate of a socio-political organisation, which afforded them the legitimacy and authority in the community to carry out the promotion. From the community perspective, accessibility to these communication events and disseminated information on handwashing varied by education and income levels. Perceptions of effective communication methods to change handwashing behaviour were also influenced by socioeconomic characteristics of the information receivers.

The study highlights the importance of understanding community-based approach to behavioural change communication, and methodological challenges in assessing such practices in the context of rural Vietnam.

Key findings from Mid-term Review

WOBA's outcome of social inclusion

- Most households thought their WASH needs have improved, as with their understanding about WASH and health and the benefits of hygienic latrine and piped water.
- Many households use other water sources to save on consumption costs.
- Some households use both old and new latrines due to habits.
- Affordability is the critical barrier for poor and vulnerable households to access sanitation and piped water.
- Although most beneficiaries understand the role of WASH, it takes time and energy for WU to convince them to attend the project.
- WOBA uses government list of poor/near poor to identify and select target households to receive OBA subsidies. However, many households are not on the list or have been removed from the list to meet the New Rural Development Program targets of reduced number of poor households.
- To ensure no one is left behind, WOBA would need to revise the baseline to ensure households that are poor/vulnerable can access the scheme.
- WOBA continues to partner with DPO (DRD/ACDC) to strengthen skills for TN/EMWF staff and implementation partners in working with PWDs, building accessible latrines, promoting the adoption of disability government policies locally.
- To date, VWU has supported 123 accessible facilities for PWD (5 public facilities in Commune Health stations and 118 latrines in households).

WOBA's outcome of women's empowerment

- The WU members take part in WOBA because they consider community support to be their responsibility and in accordance with the WU mandate.
- The WU members felt that they are change agents because of impact of their work on the communities.
- Interactions with marginalised households have allowed the WU members to understand more about the life and needs of vulnerable families.
- The WU members at the commune and village level have become more active and creative in their mobilisation methods to adapt to different types of households. As a result, they have gained confidence in mobilising households to take up WASH services.
- WOBA has increased the WU's reputation significantly in the community. At the same time, it re-enforces the normative view of WASH as a domestic task to be done by women.
- Many WU members expressed the desire for more leadership skills and opportunities in the WASH sector.
- WOBA has created job opportunities for auxiliary workers in WASH including female masons.

The ways forward

- Targeted training and support should be delivered based on partners' desires and needs.
- A forum where the WU, WASH experts and women households could support knowledge sharing about WASH in the community.
- Opportunities for the WU to take active role in all steps of the WASH service value chain, to discuss challenges encountered and to create solutions would contribute to women's empowerment.
- Changing stakeholders' attitude toward persons with disabilities (PWD) and understanding about PWDs' WASH needs is critical in inclusive WASH.
- Different ways of support for households (financial and technical) are needed to support households in taking up WASH services.
- Dedicated government support for households and private sector financing are needed for water operators to provide water services for households living in areas far from water pipelines.
- Clear and measurable indicators and robust methods of collecting data are necessary to produce quality and strong evidence of progress to achieved outcomes.
- Adaptive management and flexibility in designing and implementing project work plans are required in crisis like COVID-19 or natural disasters.

This Briefing Note was written by Dr Lien Pham, East Meets West Foundation.
For further information on WOBA Vietnam, <https://emwwoba.info>