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# CASE STUDIES IN GENDER INTEGRATION

## Market-based solutions in Cambodia

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BILL & MELINDA  
GATES *foundation*



A group of women participate in a pilot workshop in Kampong Cham province, Cambodia. The pilot phase helped set the structure for the wider Wework Collective that launched less than one year later. May 2015. Photo: © WaterShed

# INTRODUCTION

Gender matters across the sanitation value chain. It influences user behaviors and levels of participation and performance in the sanitation sector, as well as uptake of sanitation product and service design. To fully understand the role gender plays in sanitation, it is important to look beyond just biological (i.e., sex) differences and consider how cultural practices, beliefs, and norms related to gender and sanitation affect men and women.

Lack of awareness about gender differences and inequalities can create barriers to effective sanitation programming. Effectively integrating a gender lens in sanitation programming, on the other hand, can reveal important differences and inequalities. It can also support more tailored approaches to ensuring sanitation outcomes are achieved for all and that gender inequalities are not perpetuated.

The interplay of gender and sanitation is bidirectional: sanitation programs can be leveraged to improve gender equality and promote women’s empowerment, and gender inequality can be addressed as a way of improving sanitation outcomes. These do not need to be in conflict with one another, and can in fact lead to improved outcomes in both dimensions. However, gender integration must be intentional in order for this synergic effect to occur.

This case study in gender and sanitation is part of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Gender Equality Toolbox, which includes a series of case studies and other resources for supporting Program Officers in applying a gender lens to

their investments. Note that not all of these case studies are foundation-funded programs and a program’s inclusion in this series does not indicate an endorsement by the foundation.

The case studies are intended to offer readers an opportunity to unpack and understand the role of gender differences in driving sanitation outcomes, how programs identify and seek to address these differences, and whether the program also promotes gender equality and women’s empowerment. The cases are not meant to be perfect examples of how gender differences are identified and managed, but are meant as a learning tool intended to:

1. Provide insight into specific areas where gender differences exist along the sanitation value chain.
2. Showcase real programs that have intentionally worked to integrate a gender lens into their delivery, whether from the outset or as a course correction.
3. Examine challenges and emerging lessons about integrating gender across programming and policy.

Each of the three sanitation sector cases focuses on different parts of the value chain to illustrate the many ways that gender impacts sanitation outcomes for men and women.

This case explores the role of gender in the sanitation marketplace in Cambodia (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Sanitation value chain



WaterSHED Cambodia  
Gender in the sanitation market

## OVERVIEW

This case is an example of a program that aims to address gender in the sanitation marketplace to promote equal economic opportunities and increased empowerment for women in rural Cambodia.

In 2016, nearly 50% of rural Cambodians, or 6 million people, still practiced open defecation daily.<sup>1</sup> Efforts to give Cambodians access to adequate sanitation through subsidies and donations have had limited success in decreasing the frequency of open defecation. WaterSHED was founded in 2009 on the hypothesis that market-based approaches can drive better sanitation outcomes by leveraging financial incentives and consumer feedback mechanisms.<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite increasing participation of women as suppliers and sales agents in the sanitation marketplace, WaterSHED found notable disparities in participation and performance between men and women in these roles. This case explores the development of WaterSHED's women's economic empowerment program and its process for addressing barriers and promoting opportunities for women in the sanitation marketplace.

### Program description

WaterSHED was launched with a US Agency for International Development grant to promote access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene in Southeast Asia. The organization leverages marketplace dynamics to create economic opportunities for men and women, improve health outcomes, and promote sustainable models for financing development. Its theory of change assumes that affordable latrines sold by local enterprises can effectively stimulate rural household consumers to invest their own resources in durable, improved household latrines.<sup>3</sup>

WaterSHED uses a "Hands-Off" approach to improve latrine supply by transferring the work and responsibility to community members quickly and, ultimately, removing themselves as the middle man. To facilitate market mechanisms and build local capacity, WaterSHED has focused on building capacity for local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that build and sell latrines, training independent sales agents in rural

communities to stimulate demand, and engaging local government to ensure the market remains sustainable after their exit. The approach includes three components that have the following activities:<sup>4</sup>

- 1. Enterprise development:** Support local entrepreneurs and SMEs by providing training on sales and inventory tracking tools, giving one-on-one coaching to business owners, designing localized marketing tools, and connecting enterprises with independent sales agents.
- 2. Social marketing:** Develop or partner to create local social marketing campaigns and messaging to influence sanitation-related behavior change.
- 3. Government engagement:** Encourage sanitation champions within the local government and train community members to collect monitoring data.

This program has already supported over 170,000 latrine sales and contributed more than \$8.5 million to the local economy. WaterSHED currently supports 300 local sanitation enterprises across eight provinces and has recruited more than 2,000 independent sales agents, commune councilors, and community leaders to promote sanitation through the Hands-Off approach.

Though the program was intentional about including women from the beginning, there was no explicit effort to surface gender differences or address barriers unique to women. Despite overall progress in sales across the workforce, data from the program showed a notable difference in performance between men and women, suggesting that there may be important gender issues at play. The top-performing men sold an overwhelming three times more latrines per quarter than top-performing women, who comprised only 16% of entrepreneurs and local business owners that supply latrines. They also generated only 13% of total latrine sales by enterprises in the WaterSHED program. It's important to note that women often play an important role managing funds for male-owned small businesses, so we know that women are involved in managing businesses despite the limited number of women in visible leadership roles.<sup>5</sup>

For more information about WaterSHED Cambodia, visit the program's website: [www.watershedasia.org](http://www.watershedasia.org)



A community leader delivers a latrine sales presentation to a group of local families in Kampong Speu province, Cambodia. July 2016. Photo: © WaterSHED

## Gender-related barriers and opportunities

By tracking and reviewing sex-disaggregated data on performance, WaterSHED was able to identify disparities between women and men early in the program. The WaterSHED team explored funding options to better understand the gender differences and design programming that would support women to overcome gender-based barriers to participation and performance.

In November 2015, the team was awarded a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Grand Challenge: Putting Women and Girls at the Center of Development. The grant is intended to accelerate progress in the field's understanding of how to most effectively and intentionally identify and address gender inequalities and contribute to sectoral outcomes.

In early 2016, WaterSHED conducted a gender analysis to identify the critical barriers faced by female entrepreneurs, enterprise owners, and sales agents in the sanitation sector.<sup>6</sup> The intent was to uncover the underlying reasons for women's low rates of participation in SMEs and performance as sales agents and to inform the design of a program that contributed to women's economic empowerment. The gender analysis included 300 interviews with women interested in applying to the women's economic empowerment program that would be designed based on the input from this research.

**Entrepreneurs and business owners:** According to program-wide data on WaterSHED's Hands-Off approach, both men and women suppliers struggled with pricing, cash flow management, and access to capital. In particular, these struggles stemmed from defaulting customers and canceled orders, which often significantly cut into profit margins. The gender analysis identified two key challenges for female suppliers and small business owners: new customer acquisition and influence over male employees and customers.<sup>7</sup>

**Customer acquisition:** Female business owners were less engaged in professional networks and struggled to build new relationships with potential customers. As a result, the analysis found that sales agents have built their own community connections to generate demand and sales for female enterprise owners.<sup>8</sup>

**Employee and customer influence:** Perhaps more notably, female business owners mentioned that even in their position of authority, they felt they had limited influence over male employees and customers. For example, some respondents mentioned male employees would not take instructions from a female boss. Other respondents found it challenging to chase late payments and enforce deadlines with male customers. Social norms and gender expectations likely have an important influence on these power dynamics between men and women.<sup>9</sup>

**Sales agents:** The gender analysis also found four main barriers for female sales agents: limited social and professional networks, challenges with information and communication, time constraints, and mobility restrictions and risks.

**Social and professional networks:** WaterSHED found that strong social and professional networks are critical drivers of sales growth for agents. The gender analysis found that female respondents did have social connections within their communities: 42% of women interviewed said they had strong relationships with government officers and villagers. Interviewees who had experience as sales agents through the broader Hands-Off programming said they struggled to make and maintain relationships with suppliers and small business owners, especially those outside their community.<sup>10</sup>

**Information and communications:** WaterSHED found through consumer research that community members do not know much about the benefits of sanitation and do not prioritize investments in sanitation relative to other household needs. The sales agent role requires agents to educate potential consumers about both the product details and the benefits of improved sanitation practices and resources. It's no surprise that the gender analysis found communication and relationship-building skills as critical to success. Women were noted as being good at team-based problem-solving, working with others, and engaging with local village chiefs and community members. Yet many noted they felt nervous or ill-equipped to share detailed information about the product benefits and links to improvements in sanitation outcomes for the family. Women had more limited access to detailed documents and marketing materials that they could reference in conversations to make them feel more comfortable, able to answer questions and leverage their relationships to influence behavior and product uptake.<sup>11</sup>

**Time constraints:** Men and women both have competing demands on their time as sales agents. Men feel pressure to earn additional money for the household, and women are expected to balance sales with household responsibilities, which limits their capacity for full-time sales. For example, during harvest season, men leave their communities to work in agriculture and earn higher wages. However, women work more hours per week than men, largely in the form of unpaid domestic and care work. This is also true for the 65% of women in the labor market, and the number of women joining the formal paid labor force is only growing.<sup>12</sup>

Women interviewed expressed a desire for paid jobs that were closer to home so they could easily balance sales agent job responsibilities with care work. Female sales agents interviewed typically work part-time going door-to-door to conduct sales calls and encourage households to invest in latrines, whereas male sales agents on average spend more hours per week conducting sales calls.

**Mobility and physical risks:** Women cited risks of physical and sexual violence as deterring factors for joining the sales agent program. In addition, 47% of women said they were highly concerned with damaging their integrity and reputation if seen traveling alone to remote areas. Female sales agents in the current Hands-Off program often brought male counterparts or family members with them when they traveled to other villages to sell latrines. Mountainous terrain and inclement weather conditions were also barriers to mobility for women, who had less experience driving motorcycles than men. Finally, women said they did not want to travel far from home because they may not have access to sanitation facilities.<sup>13</sup>

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## Programming to address barriers

Based on the results of the gender analysis, WaterSHED designed and began implementing a program in 2016 to address identified barriers and promote opportunities for women. The program focuses on supporting women as they become active in the market (startup/recruitment), improving their performance, and ensuring they remain in the market for a sustained period of time. The program aims to both improve economic opportunities for women and strengthen their self-esteem and self-efficacy to improve their lives at home and in the community. WaterSHED's hypothesis for this program is that engaging women directly and building sustainable peer networks could be an effective way to build women's empowerment and economic success in the sanitation market.<sup>14</sup>

The main components of the program are:<sup>15</sup>

- **The WEwork Collective:** A professional training, coaching, and mentoring network of more than 200 women aimed at improving women's decision-making power and productivity as actors in the rural sanitation value chains in eight Cambodian provinces.<sup>16</sup>
- **Marketing by Women, to Women:** A campaign focused on the recruitment and retention of female sales agents to facilitate an increase in female consumers who purchase and adopt improved sanitation products. Though staff has mentioned that female sales agents may be better able to connect with female consumers, this has not been researched or explored in WaterSHED's programming to date.
- **Research:** In-depth research, guidelines, and tool development to support better engagement of women in the sanitation sector. This includes a study conducted by the human-centered design firm 17 Triggers that aimed at uncovering additional barriers female sales agents face. The human-centered design research found that female sales agents did not have adequate information about product pricing, affecting their ability to meet with and sell latrines to potential customers. It also reinforced the value of social status in the community as an influencing factor over sales success.

The Grand Challenge grant supported WaterSHED with leadership capacity and resources to implement the program for two years and test effectiveness of the programmatic approaches on women's empowerment and economic success as sales agents. Interestingly, it took time for WaterSHED leaders to convince the broader staff – who lead sales events and work in partnership with sales agents – about the value of having this additional program for women. Staff had questions about how this approach would help them reach their sales targets and sanitation goals. Leaders used field staff meetings to discuss the benefits of having a separate program focused exclusively on women. As the program began, program leaders found opportunities to highlight success stories, including videos, of women who applied and joined the WEwork program and were seeing tangible results.



WEwork participant, Bo Sambath, constructs a toilet at her home business in Kampong Speu province, Cambodia. Sambath is a local councilor who successfully promoted sanitation. She started her own construction business after taking part in WEwork after recognizing the economic opportunity for her family. February 2017. Photo: © WEwork

The gender analysis and program design have focused on the sales and supply side of the sanitation marketplace. The WaterSHED team conducted a thorough consumer research report in 2014 that identify important drivers of purchase behavior and insights into product use within the home. The team collected data at the household level and did not include sex-disaggregated data, making it difficult to surface gender differences and draw conclusions about the role of women in purchase decisions. The research that supports the WEwork collective program has not yet looked at how power dynamics in the household influence the success of female sales agents and business owners, but that could be an area for further exploration.<sup>17</sup>

Though the original barriers analysis did not explore financial incentives, the team conducted qualitative interviews midway through the project that showed female sales agents had conflicting knowledge about their opportunities for financial gain. Some female sales agents reported they did not know there were opportunities to earn money through latrine sales. In fact, they were initially driven to join the sales workforce to encourage better sanitation behavior and improve the health of the community, not to make money.<sup>18</sup>

## Measurement and evaluation

To measure empowerment outcomes, the WaterSHED team created a framework that includes eight dimensions of empowerment: decision-making, control over resources and assets, self-esteem/self-efficacy, norms, mobility, gender-based violence, collective action, and leadership. Though it's still early, a comparative assessment of baseline and six-month midline survey findings provides initial insights into the program's progress.<sup>19,20</sup> The research intentionally uses a life-cycle approach to analyze women's challenges relative to men's — it includes sex-disaggregated results by stages of business cycle or employment and an analysis of how these stages interact. Below are initial findings and observations about WaterSHED's approach to bringing a gender lens to its work:

**Hardware suppliers:** There are no data yet on improvements in cash flow management, increased profits, and/or access to financing for female or male suppliers, which makes it challenging to gauge improvements in the latrine suppliers' businesses overall. However, midline findings do show that after the WEwork Collective started, female suppliers were more engaged in business and trading activities outside the household. More specifically, the number of women involved in trading or business on behalf of the household increased from 36% at baseline to 57% at midline. Women also showed increased influence over decision-making power within their household. There are limited data showing any increases in women's influence over male employees and/or customers.<sup>21</sup>

**Sales agents:** The program aimed to increase the number of female sales agents, yet midline results showed little change in the number of women engaged in wage-earning activities. The midline results show improvements in women's social networks, agency, and communication, especially within the household. Female sales agents do appear to still struggle with communications and sales, safe and flexible mobility options, and network- and relationship-building outside their communities.<sup>22</sup>

**Social and professional networks:** WaterSHED focused significant time building connections between women to develop sustainable peer networks. Midline results show that while women strengthened their social networks within their own communities, they forged few relationships, especially professional relationships, across communities.

**Sales and communications:** Midline results continue to show male sales agents outperforming female sales agents. Interestingly, WaterSHED's research found that many successful male sales agents also hold positions of authority within the local government or community. This suggests that such combined social and political status may be a more important determinant of success than gender alone.<sup>23</sup>

Female sales agents reported greater self-efficacy and confidence after participating in the WEwork program. Many said they felt more able to control their emotions and communicate effectively with their husbands and other members of the household.<sup>24</sup> Despite this progress, the 17 Triggers study revealed that women are still less confident than men during the sale process. Women said they want to be better equipped with information about the benefits of sanitation and in-home latrines.<sup>25</sup>

**Time constraints:** Midline results show that the percentage of housework done by WEwork members fell from 63% to 52%. However, qualitative interviews with WEwork members showed that the sales agent work is still not a priority for women relative to other responsibilities. There is no midline data on whether female sales agents transition to reduced roles in housework, and whether this affects the other members of their households.<sup>26</sup>

**Mobility and physical safety:** There is no measurement that tracks the incidence of violence, harassment, or women's self-reported comfort with mobility outside the home. WaterSHED did provide a travel allowance to members of the WEwork program to ensure they had the financial means to travel, but it did not provide any additional support to address the normative constraints and physical safety risks.

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## Conclusion

The WaterSHED WEwork program is still underway but it has already uncovered important lessons about the value of taking an intentional approach to understanding and addressing gender differences. For example, conducting a gender analysis can help to reveal relevant gender gaps and inform the design of interventions that address barriers to gender equitable engagement in the sanitation sector. Monitoring progress with sex-disaggregated data and integrating gender-sensitive and/or empowerment outcomes are important for assessing impact and driving course corrections. Finally, designing programs or integrating new activities into existing programs that aim to better engage women and consider gender differences can lead to improved outcomes for all.

With final evaluation results expected in late 2017, WaterSHED will have data on program progress against sales, repayment rates, and other sanitation outcomes in early 2018. More work needs to be done to untangle the challenges for both men and women in sanitation marketing and to identify those that are gender specific. The WaterSHED team is hoping the evaluation also will provide further insight into the most relevant challenges that men and women face.<sup>27</sup>

The WaterSHED team intends to make these findings public so other WASH actors can benefit from the data and integrate lessons into their work. The team is designing actionable guidelines that provide clarity and empirical evidence on how the different components of the WaterSHED program work together to provide outcomes for women.

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Use the discussion questions below to guide your analysis of this case study on gender and sanitation. Consider what seems to have been done well, and what might have been done differently to improve how gender was identified and addressed in product and service design and execution:

1. **Which gender differences identified in the gender analysis were most relevant to sanitation outcomes? What additional information would help you better understand gender dynamics relevant to the project?**
2. **What additional data would help you better understand the experiences of men and women at the household and community level? How could that inform programming?**
3. **Which gender-based barriers do you think the program addressed well? Which ones were not addressed or might have seen more success if addressed differently?**

## END NOTES

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14. Janita Bartell, interview with FSG, April 2017.; Sarah van Boekhout, interview with FSG, April 2017.
15. WaterSHED, <http://watershedasia.org/>
16. Note: Interestingly, over 90% of the WEwork applicants participated in political or civic life within their community, and nearly 60% held a public post, primarily as village/commune council members. This participation in civic activity suggests the applicants may be relatively comfortable taking on the roles and responsibilities of a sales agent.
17. Danielle Pedi et al., Rural Consumer Sanitation Adoption Study: An Analysis of Rural Consumers in the Emerging Sanitation Market in Cambodia, WaterSHED, 2014.
18. WaterSHED, Women's Empowerment Program WEwork Collective, Midline Results, 2017.
19. Note: The quantitative values in this section are taken from the WaterSHED WEwork Collective Midline Results v1.0 PowerPoint document.
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24. Note: This was evaluated using the Gender in Science and Engineering (GSE) scale.
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27. Janita Bartell, interview with FSG, April 2017.; Sarah van Boekhout, interview with FSG, April 2017.