

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH REPORT 5

MOTIVATORS AND BARRIERS FOR SANITATION ENTERPRISES IN VIETNAM



JULY 2015

This summary presents key findings of research into the motivators, traits and challenges met by sanitation enterprises in Vietnam including gender dimensions.

Small-scale enterprises play an emerging and important role in supporting increased access to water and sanitation products and services in Vietnam and elsewhere. While studies have been undertaken to examine the results of enterprise roles, little is known about what motivates enterprises' involvement in service provision for the poor, and what enterprises see as the key factors that support and hinder their viability and business success.

This study was undertaken by Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney with Centre for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies (CRES) at the Vietnam National University in partnership with SNV. It drew on literature in the fields of small-scale enterprises, entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship to investigate the motivations, drivers and barriers for sanitation enterprises in Muong Ang District in the province Dien Bien, north west Vietnam.

STUDY PURPOSE AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore enterprise motivators and drivers and consider how these may be best harnessed and supported by development agencies and governments, within the context of an evidence base on the key real and perceived 'barriers to entry' and business risks within Vietnam's culture and regulatory environment.

This study involved structured interviews with female and male masons involved in mason businesses. In addition, an oral history approach was drawn upon with three female masons to enable deeper insight into the opportunities for, and constraints on, women's participation in enterprise development.

Research tools were developed based on the literature concerning entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship as well as previous research on the political economy of enterprise engagement in water and sanitation services in Vietnam. An analytical framework guided



Muong Ang Town

the analysis process to identify entrepreneurial traits and the most important factors influencing enterprise success. Qualitative responses were categorised into relevant themes (allowing quantitative analysis of their recurrence) and illustrative quotes used to highlight common and atypical perspectives.

ENTERPRISE CHARACTERISTICS

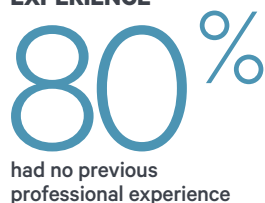
Sanitation enterprises (masons) interviewed (n = 20) were 60% male, in the range of 20–55 years old, with relatively low levels of education, and with limited or no previous work experience. Most (90%) also devoted at least part of their time to other jobs in parallel to their mason business and of the time they spent on their mason business, many constructed schemes other than toilets. The businesses were predominantly informal and micro-sized with no more than ten years of operation. Some mason businesses sold toilet pans (40%) and most offered a range of services including installation of the full toilet package with or without superstructure, as well as offering construction of toilets with labour only (i.e. household provides materials). The main customers of most businesses were households and word-of-mouth was the most commonly used marketing method. An overview of the profiles of the enterprise owners and businesses is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF SANITATION ENTERPRISES

GENDER



PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE



OTHER CONCURRENT JOB (SIDE JOB)



SIZE (NUMBER OF STAFF)



LEGAL STATUS

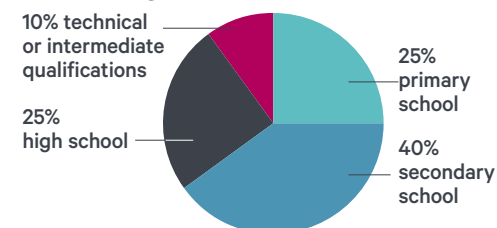


AGE



EDUCATION LEVEL

(all stated as highest education level attained)



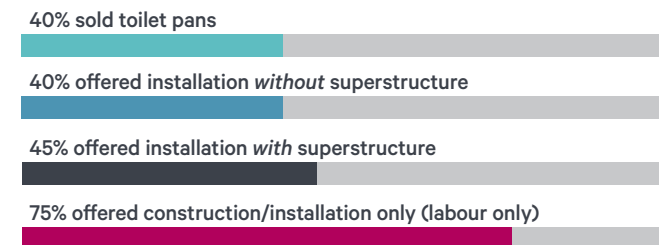
TIME SPENT BUILDING TOILETS

Two masons that spent 100% of their time on the mason business, but did not spend all their time on building toilets. Only three masons spent 100% of their time building toilets

TIME SPENT AS A MASON



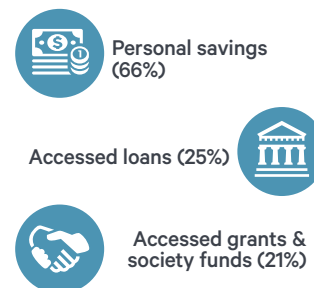
SERVICES OFFERED



BUSINESS INITIATION



SOURCE OF CAPITAL



CUSTOMER BASE



MARKETING METHODS



KEY FINDINGS ABOUT SANITATION ENTERPRISES

Entrepreneurial traits: Five entrepreneurial traits (from literature) were considered: 1) proactiveness, 2) need for independence, 3) need for achievement, 4) innovativeness, and 5) risk taking. A sub-set of quantitative and qualitative questions were relied upon to test for the presence of these traits. In general, low levels of entrepreneurial traits were found amongst respondents. The “need for achievement” was the most common entrepreneurial trait, present amongst half the masons. The “need for independence” was absent for all masons. This can be explained by the team based (and often family based) nature of the businesses. Presence of other entrepreneurial traits (risk taking, innovativeness, proactiveness) was generally weak. Most masons did not consider themselves entrepreneurs, rather their vocation was one of necessity and lack of other choices for income generation.

“

[Working as a mason is] important as a source of accumulation for the future since there is no pensions like other people in private sector. It's important to have work every day - I don't get a salary so that's why I need to work.

– Female mason

Pro-social traits: The term ‘pro-social’ is sometimes used to explain the tendency of a person to voluntarily behave (or intent to behave) in a way that benefits others and promote well-being in the society.

“

I am now receiving the respect from the community.

– Male mason

Pro-social traits acted as a motivator for some (11 out of 20) but not all masons. More males exhibited no or weak pro-social traits compared to females. More females exhibited medium or strong pro-social traits compared to males. Of the nine masons without pro-social traits, many noted their sole purpose was to earn money. Pro-social traits are disaggregated by gender in Figure 1, showing a higher proportion of males with no or weak pro-social traits, and a higher proportion of women with medium or strong pro-social traits (although caution must be taken with interpretation of this data due to the small sample size).

Motivations beyond profit and pro-social aspects were also evident amongst the respondents, with the most commonly being the respect masons received from the community due to their increased skillset.

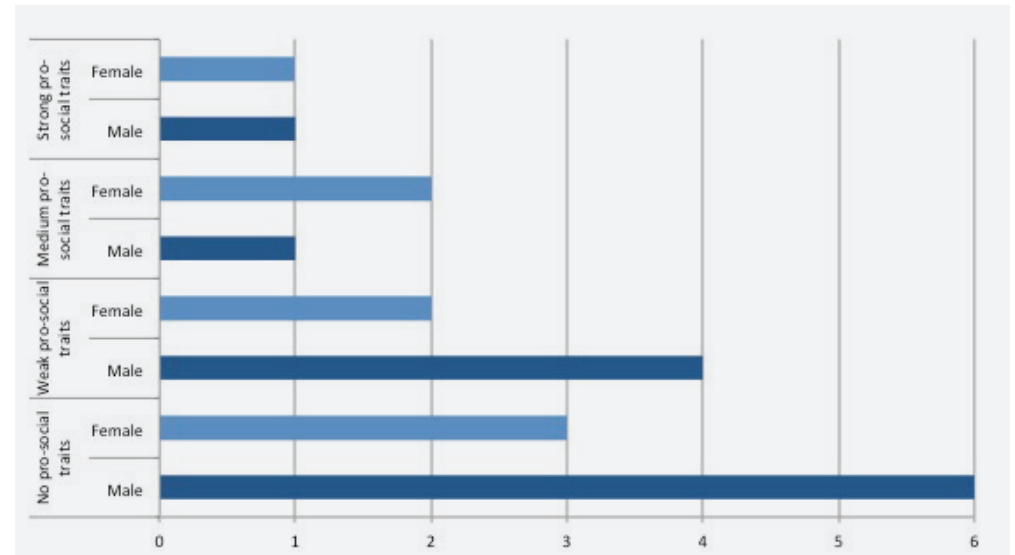
There was indicative evidence that businesses with higher revenue and profit were linked to a greater demonstration of entrepreneurial traits. There was also emerging evidence that a higher number of entrepreneurial traits corresponded to a greater propensity for medium or strong pro-social traits.

“

I chose to be a mason as being a farmer alone doesn't provide me with enough money.

– Male mason

FIGURE 1 PRO-SOCIAL TRAITS BY GENDER



“

My main purpose is not to make money but to talk to households about having a hygienic latrine... The main reason for building latrines is to help people. – Female mason

Factors affecting success: Respondents' perceptions of what characterises a leader of a successful sanitation enterprise emphasised personality traits such as dedication, determination, honesty, self-confidence and leadership. Skills were also emphasised, with technical skills raised by more than half of the masons. Other characteristics included solidarity within their mason team, support from relatives and health.

In addition, respondents were asked an open ended question “What type of person

do you think makes a successful sanitation entrepreneur?” Results are provided in Table 2 (next page). ‘Avoidance of risk’ was raised by some masons, which is interesting given that risk taking is an attribute noted in the literature to be associated with entrepreneurial behaviour. Attributes that are absent from the list are access to capital and personality traits related to problem solving – which are also linked to entrepreneurship. It is also interesting to note that ‘marketing’ is on the list, yet was not practiced to any great length by any of the masons.

Respondents were also asked about the risks they face as a mason. Financial risks were mentioned, including not being paid by customers (most commonly cited as the biggest risk), lack of capital for daily tasks, and loss of profit due to poor management. Inadequate workload was identified by one mason as the biggest internal business risk, while accidents were highlighted by four masons as the biggest external risk. Difficulty in finding the right staff and limited business knowledge was also raised as a challenge for some business owners.

Gender dimensions: In Vietnam, female masons are the exception rather than the rule, and this study sought to understand the dynamics that result in this situation, since it impacts on the opportunity for women to play roles in businesses that support improved

sanitation. There were several key gender issues that emerged from the analysis. Firstly, there were differences between female and male interviewees’ views on how easy it was for women to be masons. A large proportion of male masons thought it was *not easy* for women to play these roles, and yet a large proportion of the female masons interviewed thought it was *very easy* for women to play these roles.

There was also a gendered dimension to perceptions of the roles of men and women more generally. Male interviewees believed women should be at home attending to housework and family commitments, thus believed it was (or would be) difficult for women to be masons. Female masons interviewed were more open to playing a variety of roles, including the role of mason.



ISF-UTS researchers with female masons in Muong Ang

“Before I think it was difficult... At first I felt ashamed, as a mason they laughed at me. Now I’m chief and skilled mason.”
– Female mason

“People think the mason is not a job for women... [because it is] heavy work – but to be entrepreneurs is good for women.”
– Female mason

“I don’t think I’ll maintain being a mason because I can’t quit my duties at home. When I have some time I can work as a mason, but I’m a farmer...only if I really need the money, I work as a mason.”
– Female mason

“It is very difficult for women to be masons. People think it’s not a job for a woman.”
– Male mason

TABLE 2 TRAITS OF A SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEUR*

WHAT TYPE OF PERSONALITY DO THEY HAVE?	WHAT SKILLS DO THEY HAVE?	WHAT EXPERIENCE DO THEY HAVE?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to learn • Dedication to work • Hard working • Good tempered • Calm and patient • Honest • Intelligent • Kind hearted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled in construction • Meets customer’s needs • Skilled in planning and provision of estimates • Good listening • Marketing • Design skills • Team management • Strength • Fast worker • Professional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with other masons • Avoidance of risk • Experience in building quality construction

* *bolded responses represent most commonly reported traits across open-ended and prompted questions*

Another challenge for women to be masons (or entrepreneurs more generally), identified by both male and female interviewees, was that women often lacked their own capital, and were in more stressed economic conditions than men which provided an obstacle to entrepreneurship as noted by a male mason: *“Not so many women are business owners; there is a lack of money to invest”* and also a female mason: *“It is difficult for women to be business women, due to the economic conditions of women”*. Finally, one female mason noted how she was initially ridiculed when first working as a mason and it took time for her to build her own confidence to overcome these public perceptions.

The life stories of female masons (collected through oral history analysis) also raised relevant gender issues. For example, gender roles in the family were raised, where one mason note how her parents supported her education: *“It was unusual that my parents were so supportive of [my] education”*. Cultural and social expectations of men and women was discussed in terms of responsibilities of looking after parents (*“that was their responsibility as elder sisters”*); and shame associated with stepping out of traditional roles was noted to have diminished as confidence grew and a change in mindset emerged (one mason noted that *“men can be mason, women can be mason. My thinking has changed”*). These issues also demonstrate changes in the way women are viewed in Vietnamese society over time, e.g. how market reforms in the mid-to-late 1980s led to changes in women's roles, as women were forced to retreat to unpaid household labour

TABLE 3 SUMMARY OF MOTIVATORS AND BARRIERS FOR EXISTING SANITATION ENTERPRISES

MOTIVATORS / ENABLERS	BARRIERS / CONSTRAINTS
Characteristics of success and challenges	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedication • Determination • Ability and willingness to learn • Technical skills (e.g. in design / drawing) • Solidarity with team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not being paid by customers / paid late • Inadequate workload / not enough sales • Accidents • Disagreement with customer • Lack of / limited business knowledge • Difficulty in finding staff with right skills • High level of competition • Remote location of customers (transportation and cost challenges) • Inadequate income from mason business
Entrepreneurial and pro-social traits	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to learn • Skilled in construction • Experience in working with other masons • The presence of pro-social traits provided an additional driver for some masons to continue in their role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited presence of entrepreneurial traits, particularly risk-taking, proactiveness and innovativeness.
Gender differences affecting women's role in sanitation businesses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief instilled from childhood that females and males are essentially the same and can perform in the same job • Education encouraged for girls • Financial status allowing for education for both girls and boys • Confidence gained through experience, allowing female masons to overcome feelings of shame or inadequacy • Having a role within the Women's Union provided a means of introduction to potential customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preconceived idea that masonry work is not for women due to physical nature of the work (may be true for some women, not for others) • Preconceived idea that women are slower learners and have less skills than men generally • Some women lack investment capital required for mason business • Belief in cultural gender roles amongst some masons led them to see women's role was at home • Sense of shame some women felt in stepping out of these gender roles • Limited / lack of female mason role models to encourage them to persist with the job should they want to • The perception (predominantly amongst men) that it is difficult for women to be entrepreneurs can act as a barrier to entry. Some males may discourage women to play mason roles, or be reluctant to take them on as mason assistants.

(Beresford, 2008). The latter situation and corresponding status of women appears to dominate in the male interviewee's perspectives towards women's roles; i.e. that they need to fulfil these household responsibilities rather than participate in income generation outside the home.

Perceptions of gender, and the roles men and women play in society, are therefore not static, rather they are shaped by a number of factors either explicitly or implicitly. Drawing on these findings can help to understand how to support female masons play stronger roles in sanitation businesses. Such support may involve providing opportunities for experienced female masons to share their stories as a means to build confidence in others, ongoing mentoring from experienced female masons or targeted training and support that is aimed at potential female masons, addressing the broad range of challenges they face in this field.

Table 3 (previous page summarises the overarching motivations (or enablers) and barriers (or constraints) to sanitation enterprises in Muong Ang. They are grouped according to the component of the analysis from which they are drawn.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the motivators and barriers faced by sanitation enterprises in Muong Ang District, north-west Vietnam. Results highlight that beyond the “need for achievement”, masons generally lacked traits identified in the literature that are associated with being an entrepreneur. Some were motivated by pro-social goals, such as keeping

the environment clean and helping others with access to hygienic sanitation options.

Barriers to entering sanitation enterprises, or playing more prominent roles in mason business included the inability for some customers to pay, high competition amongst mason teams and limited available work. Difficulty in finding the right staff and limited business knowledge was also raised as a challenge for some mason business owners. These challenges may be overcome through measures such as targeted training, and government support for poor customers. More nuanced policy relating to supporting the private sector in rural and remote locations may also be needed, with CSOs and research institutions able to play roles in providing an evidence base for such policies.

By taking a gender lens to analysis, results revealed differences in male and female interviewee's perceptions of female masons, which often stemmed from how females were viewed more generally, and the roles they played in the home and providing for their families. Women were able to perform in the role of mason – some becoming chief masons with their own teams, and gaining confidence as they did so. As more examples of females in these roles emerge, it is anticipated that perceptions of women's roles may begin to change and more females can have active roles in sanitation businesses. It is also important to note that gender roles in Vietnam are dynamic, and these have shifted over time due to political and economic influences.

This research has shown that more could be done to attract and retain women in small

business roles that relate to sanitation – an area closely related to women's roles in a traditional sense. For example, the government could provide vocational education for girls as a way to specifically address the barriers women and girls face to working as masons, providing them with practical experience and confidence to take on roles in sanitation. CSOs, through their relationships with communities, government and other organisations working in sanitation, may be able to assist in enabling the sharing of such stories. Establishing mason associations, which have provided a supportive environment for businesses in other locations, may also be an area CSOs can provide support. Associations may also be formed for female masons to specifically address the barriers they face. Doing so may help to overcome perceptions of gender stereotypes that have in the past provided barriers to women playing certain roles, for example as masons and entrepreneurs. By building on and increasing the motivating factors and addressing the barriers and challenges, and understanding that gender roles in sanitation can be flexible, opportunities can be maximised to enhance the environment for sanitation enterprises to become successful.

— This summary report draws from the following technical report: Gero, A., Willetts, J. and Murta, J. (2015) *Motivators and barriers for sanitation enterprises in Vietnam*, Enterprise in WASH - Research Report 5, Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney

ENTERPRISE IN WASH

'Enterprise in WASH' is a joint research project led by the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) at the University of Technology Sydney, which investigates the role of private and social enterprises in the delivery of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services for the poor. For other Enterprise in WASH publications, see www.enterpriseinwash.info

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