

# Locally Led, Locally Owned: WaterSHED's Civic Champions Program

As WASH markets in rural Cambodia are taking off, communities that are similar in nearly every way show vastly different results. Some make incredible progress. Others lag behind. Working at scale has given us a vantage point to see what drives these different results.

We learned that a key driver can be the councilor in local government who demonstrates initiative and action, versus the one who believes nothing will ever change. In fact, we see local leadership as the biggest driver of sustainable WASH.

But can something be done to foster the emergence of local leadership, instead of simply hoping for the best?

Turns out, yes. And not only yes, our program to cultivate local leadership behaviours is the most impactful component of our work to build markets for sustainable WASH. It was a critical factor in our ability to exit the market. These leaders are Civic Champions.



Figure 1 - Highlighted results of Civic Champions programming from 2013 to 2017

## A Very Brief History : Program Pilot 2013

Following the principle that leadership is an acquirable set of skills – and not an innate ability – the Civic Champions program was designed to inspire and develop those committed to becoming outstanding leaders, rather than supporting pre-selected candidates. It specifically targets commune-level government officials, but also involves every other level of subnational authority (“government”) in the process as facilitators, advisors, and advocates.

WaterSHED piloted the Civic Champions leadership development program in 2013-14 (in 2 districts). The success of the pilot iteration demonstrated the viability and impact of this approach to leadership development, and led to a scaled-up iteration in 2015-16 (16 districts) which explored scalability and cost-efficiency. Further implementation has seen CivicChampions rolled out across all districts in the eight provinces of Cambodia in WaterSHED's network, covering approximately 40% of the population by population.

From the evaluation of the pilot: “What is unique about the Civic Champions project is that it shows the participants the paths and lets them discover how to walk those paths themselves. One participant commented on what is different about Civic Champions this way:

‘before there was [an NGO] donating concrete slabs and rings for latrines, but some people just used those rings as storage for hay. That created difficulty for us as Commune Councilors too because there were not enough for everyone. People cried nepotism and blamed us for giving to one and not another. Now there's nothing to give, neutral, so there is no more blame of nepotism.’”

## Key Program Elements

Multiple iterations of the program have been tested since the pilot, but several elements remain consistent. In these aspects, the approach stands apart from conventional capacity development programs:

- Participation fee for buy-in: elected officials must apply to join, and instead of receiving lucrative per diems, they pay to participate. During the pilot, participants paid participation fee out of pocket. We now see a mix of commune budget support and personal funds.
- Training cycles: the program's cyclical design has proven to be important to introduce ideas over time, reinforce earlier concepts, and most importantly, inspire participants' confidence as they see others around them achieve goals and model behavior. See Figure 2.
- Learning by doing: Rather than passively absorbing a predetermined curriculum during a one-off training, participants drive the iterative process themselves with goal-setting, problem-solving, and peer reporting on achievements and challenges.
- Quantitative measurement of leadership performance: Through a process of creating a vision for community development with their constituents, developing a plan of action, and executing against it, the project couples soft skills development with tangible gains in sanitation.
- Awards mechanism for peer recognition: A core component of the program is peer learning and peer recognition for good leadership. The participation fees enable an elaborate awards ceremony with trophies and certificates.

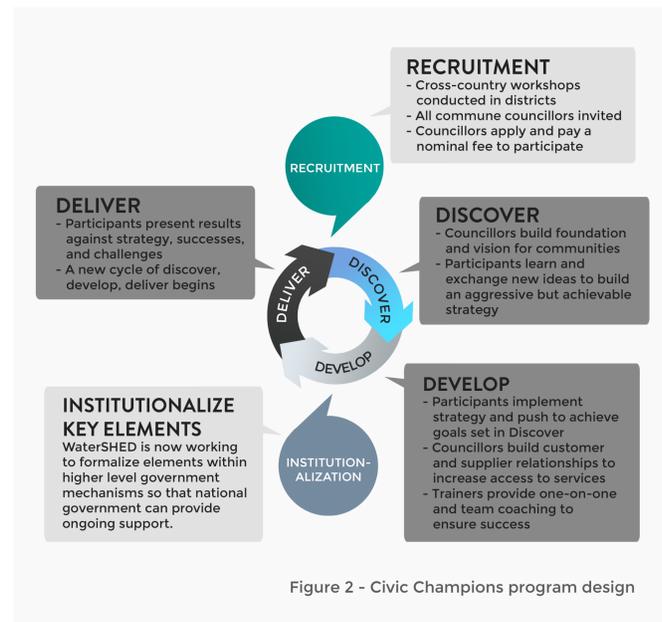


Figure 2 - Civic Champions program design

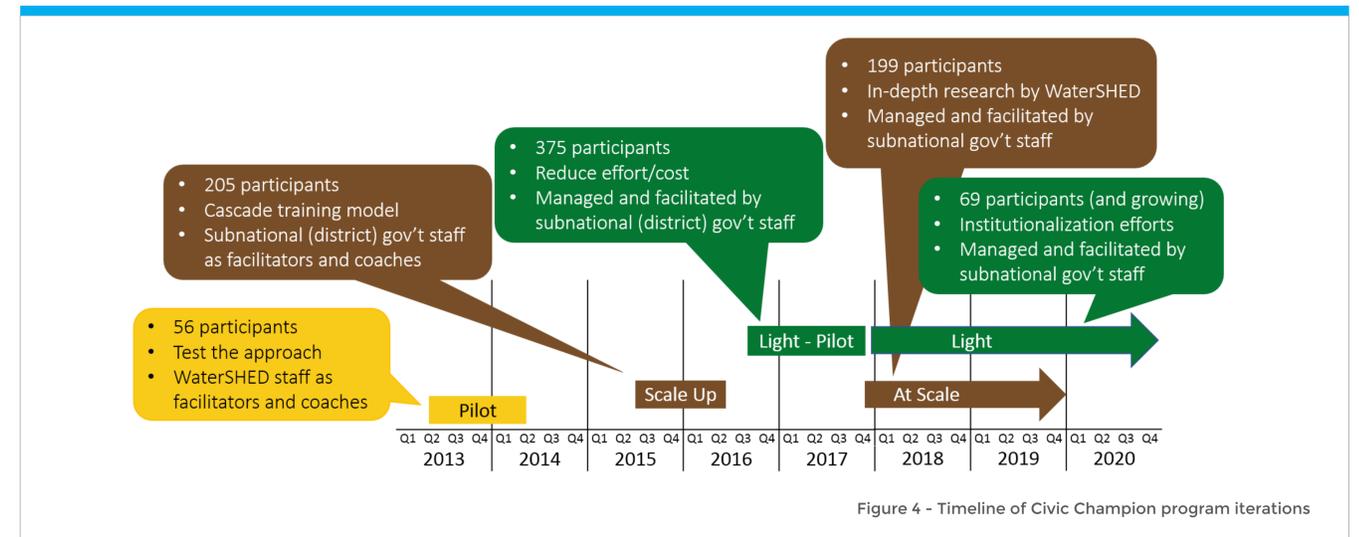


Figure 4 - Timeline of Civic Champion program iterations

## Evaluation Highlights : a 2015-2016 scale-up

**Impact:** this scaled-up iteration significantly accelerated growth in the sanitation market, reversed a trend of slowing latrine sales, and reduced latrine sale fluctuations (see figure3). **During implementation, participating districts saw a 20 pp higher increase in sales growth compared to non-participating districts (+4% vs -16% annual sales growth).** The activities also fostered positive personal changes in participants and facilitators. During interviews, participants reported increased commitment to their work and greater perseverance in overcoming challenges, better ability to speak in public and a new definition of leadership based on relationship-building with constituents.

**Sustainability:** the program focuses on fostering a community of leaders through peer discussion, self-reflection, and ongoing coaching. The capacity development, engagement, and commitment of participants led to new and adapted sanitation promotion strategies localized for each councilor's unique context, an important indicator of sustainability.

**Scalability:** the initial scaled-up iteration (see figure 4 for timeline) demonstrated how to expand the pilot by a factor of four, without losing impact, and while significantly reducing costs. A cascade facilitation model allowed district and provincial government staff to have a strong voice during the design and facilitation of conference activities, build their leadership skills, and leverage their expertise in working with commune councilors. In fact, the success of the cascade model and the scaled-up phase provided strong evidence that an understanding of rural context and the participants' progress — something for which provincial facilitators are well positioned — is at least as important as advanced leadership skills.

**Cost-effectiveness:** At USD\$14.40 per latrine, the scaled-up iteration may have had the lowest cost per latrine of all sanitation interventions in Cambodia. The scale-up was two times more cost-effective than the pilot iteration, primarily because of the lower costs of leadership expertise and significant contributions from the government, mainly in the form of staff time.

## Looking Forward : 2018-2020

Civic Champions is a bold, non-traditional approach to development. It is more than just a scalable mechanism to promote the leadership development of subnational government. At its core, Civic Champions embodies a comprehensive mindset change that helps government develop the skills, agency, and motivation to fulfill their mandate and instigate positive change in their communities.

Other actors in the sector are seeing the value in Civic Champions. WaterAid Cambodia is replicating a version of the program, and Plan International and iDE have requested to implement the program in Cambodia. Most importantly, we see potential pathways to institutionalizing the approach within the Cambodian government: Through our advocacy efforts, we see growing interest by the Ministry of Interior to incorporate the program into its framework for distributing authority and responsibility to provincial government.

In 2019, the provincial government of Kampong Speu will be leading a province-wide roll out of the Civic Champions program. The government will be leading all activities; WaterSHED will functions as a consultant and co-funder.

The provincial government of Pursat is also in discussion with WaterSHED to co-host Civic Champions, with district leaders hosting training in district halls -- significantly reducing programming costs.

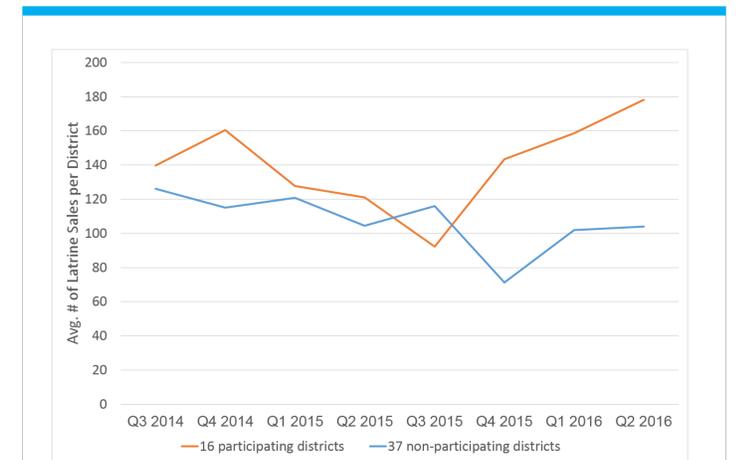


Figure 3 - average number of latrine sales per district by WaterSHED-supported businesses (July 2014-June 2016)

## 99% of toilets installed were sold without NGO assistance by end of 2017

Introducing Civic Champions led to high levels of 'independent sales' of toilets – a metric we use to gauge sustainability – 94% of the toilets installed under WaterSHED's sanitation marketing programme during the first six months of 2017 were sold without direct assistance by WaterSHED (see Figure 5).

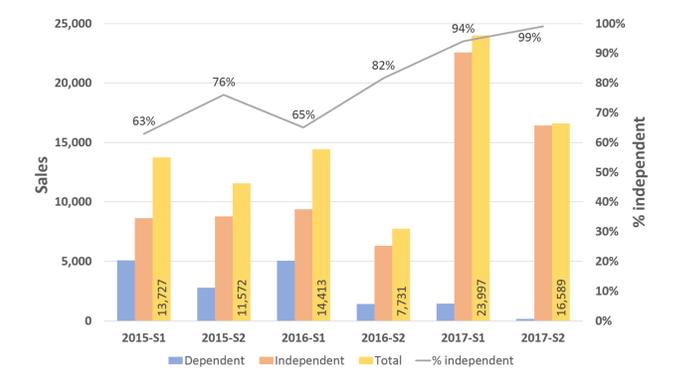


Figure 5 - Independent Sales (2015-2017)