

# SANIVAT Policy brief

## Key messages

- Rural hygiene and sanitation promotion (RHSP) faces several implementation constraints in Vietnam despite high political support and a multi-sectorial approach.
- Four key barriers to implementation are: weak inter-sectorial collaborations, frustrated frontline promoters, information-based and passive promotion methods, and context unadjusted promotion strategies across ethnic groups.
- The Vietnamese government needs to strengthen sector co-operation and integration towards shared goals in RHSP and to shift the RHSP approach towards comprehensive and socio-culturally adjusted health promotion, with extra focus on the most disadvantaged ethnic minorities including highland groups.
- School based sanitation promotion is insufficient to change sanitation behaviour of school children irrespective of their ethnicity. Schools, households and communities must work more closely together to increase use and uptake of latrine use among school children.
- Contractors of latrine facilities must work more closely with local school management when constructing latrines, including identifying location, design, and appropriate systems of water supply. Funds should be available to allow the school to maintain the sanitation infrastructure and keep it hygienic and appealing for users.
- Research should be integrated into national and international supported water and sanitation programs, e.g. to assess health impact and community responses to interventions.
- The findings in SANIVAT are important for future RHSP in Vietnam and in other multi-cultural and multi-ethnic population groups in the region and globally.

## SANIVAT Project Summary

The direct human health benefits from interventions within water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion are often questioned. Before SANIVAT (“Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion in Vietnam – community response and health impacts”) was implemented little was known in Vietnam about the health impact of water, sanitation and hygiene interventions and how people perceive hygiene, health risks and different types of hygiene interventions. The Danida and other donor supported Rural Water Supply and Sanitation National Target Program II (RWSS-NTPII) provided a unique opportunity for SANIVAT to conduct inter-disciplinary operational field research to generate new knowledge of impact on human health and environmental pollution by the planned interventions in the Lao Cai province.



Traditional Vietnamese household with latrine connected to fish pond.

The Immediate Objectives of SANIVAT were:

- Strengthened capacity at partner institutions to conduct inter-disciplinary field research on community response and health impacts of water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion interventions
- Assessed health impact and community response to water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion supported by Danish sector program support



Within the framework of RWSS-NTPII, SANIVAT has through MSc and PhD student research and a variety of different training courses built research capacity among the participating Vietnamese research and local government institutions to achieve its immediate objectives. In-depth knowledge of how different minority groups perceive hygiene and their reactions to hygiene promotion interventions have been obtained and disseminated to stakeholders to be used to improve and increase the efficiency of current and future intervention programs. The participating researchers and their Vietnamese institutions have obtained valuable experience in how research capacity building and inter-disciplinary operational field research can take place in a cost-effective and synergistic manner within donor supported aid programs.

SANIVAT has further enabled researchers and the Vietnamese institutions to disseminate and communicate research findings to the international scientific community, e.g. through peer-reviewed journal articles and conference presentations, as well as end-users and the public in general. Through WATSAN and other network contacts the participating institutions have been able to obtain external funding for follow-up research activities.

### **SANIVAT Partner Institutions**

SANIVAT was implemented from 2007-20013. The Department of Veterinary Disease Biology of the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences at the University of Copenhagen (UC-HEALTH) has been the principal responsible partner, and the National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology, Hanoi, Vietnam, has been the responsible national counterpart.

Other participating institutions included: the National Institute of Occupational and Environmental Health, Hanoi; the National Institute of Nutrition, Hanoi; the Hanoi Medical University, Hanoi; the Preventive Medicine Centre of Lao Cai province, Lao Cai province. In Denmark: Department of International Health, Immunology, Microbiology, UC-HEALTH and the Statens Serum Institute.

### **Impact and policy changes**

- During SANIVAT a total of 5 PhD and 2 MSc fellows have conducted their study programs. More than 10 peer-reviewed articles have been published, and numerous presentations to a wide range of stakeholders have been done.
- SANIVAT has shown how research can be integrated into a national and international supported water and sanitation program (RWSS-NTPII), i.e. to assess health impact and community responses to interventions.
- Continued dialog and meetings with institutional stakeholders in RWSS-NTPII, e.g. through the WATSAN network, and local institutions in Lao Cai province, have ensured dissemination of results and experiences to key stakeholders and end-users.

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