

Community-led Total Sanitation in Nepal: Findings from an Implementation Case Study

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Purpose

This learning brief shares key findings from a case study of community-led total sanitation (CLTS) implementation in Plan International Nepal program areas, focusing on the roles and responsibilities of local actors. Several implications are relevant for consideration by Plan International Nepal and other sanitation practitioners.

The brief is part of the CLTS Learning Series, a collection of case studies on CLTS implementation, prepared by The Water Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as part of the Plan International USA project, *Testing CLTS Approaches for Scalability*.

Methods

In August 2013, a researcher from The Water Institute collected data in the capital city, Kathmandu, and in Makwanpur, Banke, and Morang districts. Data collection consisted of in-depth interviews with 63 respondents, visits to six triggered areas of the country, and a review of relevant organizational documents and national reports.

Role of Local Actors

The main actors involved in CLTS activities are Plan International Nepal, government actors, local non-governmental organizations (LNGOs), and community triggerers. Within the government, water, sanitation, and hygiene coordination committees (WASHCCs) have been established at the national, regional, district, village development committee (VDC), and ward levels. The VDC is the basic unit of open defecation free (ODF) declaration in Nepal and comprises many smaller villages.

District WASHCCs, which include government offices, I/NGOs, and UN agencies, are the main mechanism for coordinating and implementing sanitation activities. Concerned district government offices and I/NGOs are assigned different VDCs in which to work. The VWASHCC is then responsible for coordinating CLTS planning, triggering, and follow-up across all nine wards in the VDC. Plan International Nepal's partner LNGOs lead triggering and train VWASHCC on CLTS techniques. Community triggerers and ward WASHCCs, composed of community-based leaders and organizations, are responsible for mobilizing communities and monitoring progress towards ODF status. Figure 1 illustrates the roles of these various actors.

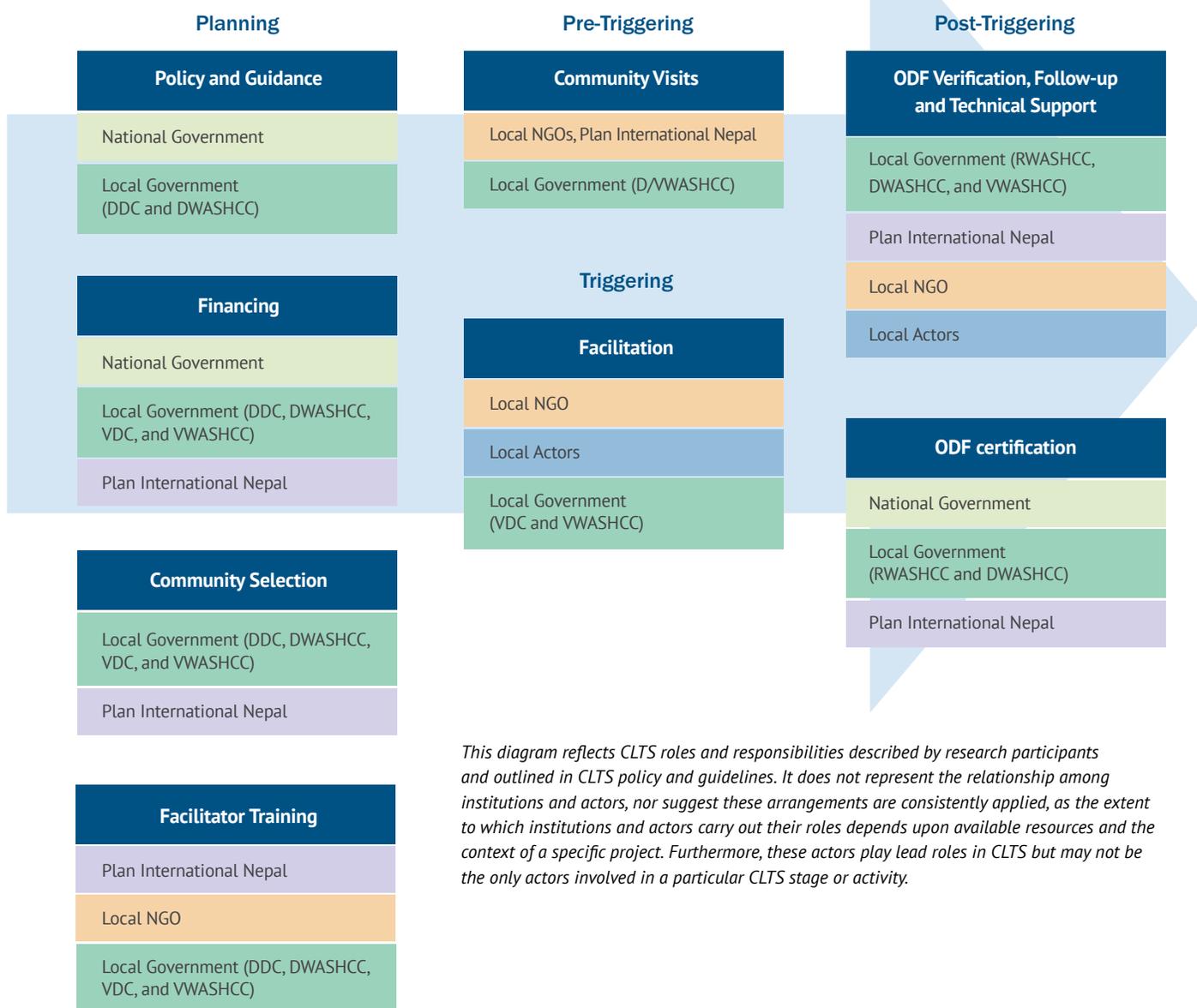
Key Findings



Pour Flush Toilet in Nepal
Photo by Vidya Venkataramanan

1. **The Government of Nepal has demonstrated a strong commitment to CLTS by incorporating it into national policies and strategic plans.** There is a strong, decentralized structure for CLTS implementation that allows Plan International Nepal to train and build capacity of local actors.
2. **“Sector triggering”, a lobbying strategy by government actors, facilitates progress at the district level.** This approach allows Plan International Nepal and their LGNO partners to continue focusing on triggering communities, while also emphasizing the government's all-inclusive CLTS strategy.
3. **Despite intensive involvement by community leaders, NGOs continue to play a lead role in triggering and monitoring progress.** Plan International Nepal and partner LNGOs can aid capacity building at the VDC level through targeted training of community actors, while continuing to actively monitor triggered communities.
4. **A variety of local financing options exist, however, there is still a challenge in ensuring this support reaches vulnerable communities.** Context specific approaches may be especially necessary in communities that have seen slower progress over time.

Figure 1. Lead Roles in Plan International Nepal's CLTS Programs, 2014



This diagram reflects CLTS roles and responsibilities described by research participants and outlined in CLTS policy and guidelines. It does not represent the relationship among institutions and actors, nor suggest these arrangements are consistently applied, as the extent to which institutions and actors carry out their roles depends upon available resources and the context of a specific project. Furthermore, these actors play lead roles in CLTS but may not be the only actors involved in a particular CLTS stage or activity.

CLTS Progress

Table 1 highlights data obtained from Plan International Nepal's CLTS projects. As of 2014, they had implemented CLTS in 105 VDCs across six districts. Baseline toilet coverage was available for 32 VDCs, which reported 32% coverage before triggerings. Endline toilet coverage varied across districts, from 34% in Banke district to 100% in Makwanpur district. The five districts not reported as 100% ODF are found in the Terai region which is characterized by low-lying plains and high population density. These results suggest alternative targeting approaches may be needed to reach Terai communities that have had slow progress.

Key Findings

Finding 1: The Government of Nepal has demonstrated a strong commitment to CLTS by incorporating it into the national policy and strategic plan.

The government's Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan ("Master Plan") has established a strong, decentralized structure for implementation of CLTS activities, which has allowed CLTS to be taken to scale. The government promotes a variety of behavior change approaches to achieve ODF status (the primary outcome for sanitation), which includes CLTS and School-led Total Sanitation.

Table 1. Toilet Coverage and ODF Outcomes in Plan International Nepal CLTS Communities, 2014

District ^a	Makwanpur	Banke	Morang	Rautahat	Sindhuli	Sunsari	Total
District ODF status	ODF	Not ODF	Not ODF	Not ODF	Not ODF	Not ODF	NA
VDCs triggered	13	23	25	25	13	6	105
VDCs declared ODF	13 (100%)	3 (13%)	6 (24%)	1 (4%)	3 (23%)	3 (50%)	29 (28%)
Baseline Average Toilet Coverage ^b	39%	16%	41%	27%	41%	28%	32%
Endline Average Toilet Coverage ^c	100%	34%	49%	41%	53%	78%	59%

Source: Plan International Nepal, 2014

^a Outcomes listed are only for VDCs triggered by Plan International Nepal in these districts.

^b Baseline data available for 32 ODF VDCs.

^c Endline data available for 103 VDCs as of November 2014.

At the time of this study, government officials had been working closely with Plan International Nepal to ensure that there was no overlap in approaches between VDCs in a given district.

Interviews revealed that district strategic plans tended to set ambitious targets for toilet coverage, likely due to pressure to meet the national goal of 100% toilet coverage by 2017. This ambitious target setting makes it more challenging for Plan International Nepal to influence outcomes in their areas since the government is rushing to meet unrealistic targets rather than focusing on the quality of implementation.

Finding 2: Sector triggering, a lobbying strategy by government actors, facilitates progress at the district level.

In addition to triggering communities, government officials often spoke of triggering other sectors of society. This process is referred to as *sector triggering*, and it occurs mainly at the district level. Using this approach, national government officials trigger 50-60 participants from government, media, political parties, and social service organizations to promote the importance of achieving ODF status in their districts. In addition, a number of conferences have been held with groups of 100–300 stakeholders to advocate for achieving ODF status at the district level. This process is viewed as complementary to community triggering, and helps the government to create a favorable environment for achieving long-term behavior change. In this manner, those in influential positions at the district level are triggered by the government, while Plan International Nepal and their LNGO partners focus on triggering communities.

Finding 3: Despite intensive involvement by community leaders, NGOs continue to play a lead role in triggering and monitoring progress.

In Plan International Nepal program areas, local actors are trained and empowered to take charge of the CLTS process in all stages. VWASHCCs are expected to play the lead role in CLTS activities, and recruit volunteer community triggerers to conduct door-to-door campaigning and follow-up to spread sanitation behavior change messages.

However, as volunteers, these community-level actors do not have sufficient capacity to conduct triggering on their own. Therefore, Plan International Nepal and their partner LNGOs continue to play an intensive role in triggering and post-triggering activities to ensure progress. LNGOs did not appear to have sufficient capacity to trigger communities, as each facilitator was reportedly responsible for triggering anywhere from 7,000 to 10,000 households. This shortage of personnel not only affects the quality of triggering that is occurring, but also makes it challenging for facilitators to routinely follow-up with communities and effectively monitor progress.

Finding 4: A variety of local financing options exist, however, there is still a challenge in ensuring this support reaches vulnerable communities.

CLTS practitioners have long struggled to address the issue of increasing toilet access for vulnerable communities. To

address this concern, the Master Plan includes a provision that gives local governments the authority to decide whether and how financial support should be provided to low-income communities within their jurisdiction. This provision has resulted in the development of innovative financing mechanisms in local communities. A few examples of these mechanisms include asking wealthier community members to make contributions for the construction of poor member's toilets; using wood donated by the forest user's committee for toilet construction for the poor; or a VDC using a portion of its sanitation budget to provide discounted cement concrete rings and pans and pipes to poor households. However, a challenge remains in ensuring that financial assistance is accurately targeted to disadvantaged sections of the population, and that financial assistance indeed promotes long-term behavior change.

Implications

This study reviewed aspects of Plan International Nepal's CLTS process with a specific focus on local actors and their roles in achieving and monitoring impact. The following implications highlight areas where government actors and Plan International Nepal can improve their CLTS activities

Ambitious national target-setting not only pressures local government officials to enforce rapid progress, but could also make it challenging to realize true behavior change in some communities. Instead, a focus on ensuring gradual yet sustained outcomes in program areas could be a more effective approach.

Sector triggering is a valuable addition to the CLTS process in Nepal that allows the government to generate support from a diverse group of actors that are important to realizing behavior change. This involvement from the government allows Plan International Nepal and their LNGO partners to continue focusing their efforts on triggering at the community level.

VDC-level and community volunteers play an important role in CLTS, but they did not have sufficient capacity to lead the process. Plan International Nepal and partner LNGOs need to

continue strengthening community capacity through technical support and targeted trainings of community leaders, while continuing to actively monitor triggered communities. Furthermore, Plan International Nepal needs to involve a greater number of LNGOs so that they are able to play a more active role alongside community leaders.

The national government has developed an innovative approach that allows local governments to determine mechanisms for toilet hardware support. However, there is still a risk of vulnerable populations being left out of the process. Therefore, it will be important to ensure that financial assistance is accurately targeted to those most in need. Plan International Nepal and local governments should continue to work with communities to ensure that financial mechanisms are locally developed, and adapted to achieve equitable progress.

Limitations

This study uses qualitative methods and a small sample size. Researchers did not evaluate program effectiveness. Although readers may connect these findings to their own CLTS experiences, they should be cautious about generalizing the findings. Furthermore, researchers visited a subset of communities where Plan International Nepal implements CLTS, which means the study may not fully capture all aspects of CLTS implementation in Nepal. 💧

The *Testing CLTS Approaches for Scalability* project involves The Water Institute at UNC working with Plan International USA to evaluate whether capacity strengthening of local actors influences CLTS outcomes. Our activities span 10 countries in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.

More information, project resources, and news are available at waterinstitute.unc.edu/clts.

Acknowledgements

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