



EMERGING LEARNING

Recruitment of Sanitation Entrepreneurs

COTE D'IVOIRE

Introduction

Access to toilets is still a luxury in Côte d'Ivoire. According to the 2016 JMP-UNICEF report¹, only 39% of the country's urban population owns an improved household toilet, while 36% use sanitation facilities shared with other families. Many households, especially the poorest, either live without toilets and practice open defecation or share a single latrine, often maintained in poor condition.

To improve access to sanitation for low-income households, Population Services International (PSI) is implementing a USAID-funded urban sanitation project called Sanitation Service Delivery (SSD) in partnership with WSUP and PATH. This project aims to catalyze the private sector to provide low-cost, high-quality sanitation products and services to low-income urban and peri-urban populations in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Benin.

Program Approach

SSD uses a market-based approach to increase access to sanitation by building the capacity of local entrepreneurs to provide products and services that meet the needs of potential customers.

In the city of Abidjan, the project team used three different methods to identify and select private sector actors – manufacturers and masons – to become service providers for “*Sani Plus*”, the sanitation brand developed by SSD. *Sani Plus* offers a range of sanitation products and services for households, including installation of toilets, septic tanks and soak away pits, as well as mechanized septic tank emptying services. In particular, the project sought out entrepreneurs based in target geographies and that had prior experience managing a team of craftsmen, such as masons, plumbers and well diggers.



Selected entrepreneurs received three days of training on *Sani Plus*, which included two days of theoretical sessions and one day of practical training. Thereafter, each entrepreneur was expected to send at least two masons to receive practical training.

Recruiting the right entrepreneurs to collaborate with the project turned out to be more difficult than anticipated. Thus far, the project has tried three different approaches to recruitment, each yielding different results and offering important lessons.

Scouring the Yellow Pages

In the Municipality of Yopougon, located in the suburbs of Abidjan, the SSD Cote d'Ivoire consulted the Yellow Pages of Cote d'Ivoire's national directory to identify and contact building and public works companies. Over the course of about two months, the team used this approach to recruit 13 companies that met the project's expertise and managerial criteria. These companies were then trained and equipped to implement the project activities for customers in Yopougon.

However, one month after training, seven companies withdrew from the program, stating that the sale of toilets and sanitation facilities at a small scale was not sufficiently lucrative, given their alternative options of working on the construction of buildings and residential houses. About six months later, the project team ended its collaboration with another three companies due to failure to produce quality work, leaving only three of the original 13 companies that were trained.

While it was expected that recruiting entrepreneurs with extensive experience and staff would make facilitate training on quality construction and ensure timely toilet delivery, it was determined that the larger businesses were not sufficiently motivated to sell a low cost product in a nascent, low volume sanitation market

Recruitment Through the Municipality

In an attempt to recruit microentrepreneurs in the Municipality of Attécoubé, the SSD team worked with the technical departments of the local government offices to identify private contractors who could implement project activities. This approach leveraged municipal resources and existing knowledge of local stakeholders and market actors.

Involving the municipal government helped strengthen the confidence of the selected entrepreneurs in the project team and resulted in the recruitment of 11 companies. Having entrusted the entire contractor selection process to the municipality, the SSD team was surprised on the first day of the training to find that many of the companies recruited were made up of unskilled personnel. Within one month of the training, ten out of the eleven entrepreneurs selected by municipality staff had withdrawn from the program, either due to lack of motivation or lack of skill for installing new toilet products.

Open Call for Applicants

For its next recruitment strategy, the SSD project team published a request for applicants targeted at small construction and public works companies in local newspapers. The call for interest was also posted in city hall. This approach resulted in the highest number of applications, with entrepreneurs applying based on their actual desire and availability to work on sanitation with SSD. This approach has led to higher retention of entrepreneur partners, with six out of eight still collaborating with the project.

Key Insights/Lessons Learned

Priority should be placed on small construction contractors. The recruitment process demonstrated that large construction and public work companies, such as those found in the Yellow Pages, were not interested in collaborating with SSD, as they felt that household sanitation did not represent an attractive market. These large companies favored larger-scale projects such as the construction of buildings and pipelines and were reluctant to provide services through SSD. The project learned that it was more effective to target small semi-formal construction contractors that were already providing similar services and products, even if they are less efficient than large companies.

Contractors should be carefully vetted, particularly when referred by a third party. As the SSD project expanded to new cities, the team asked municipal technical departments to provide contact information for recommended local contractors. However, many of those recommended did not have the basic masonry skills needed to work in the sanitation sector and would have required extensive training and oversight. It is thus necessary to implement an additional control mechanism, such as a pre-test, for entrepreneurs referred by third parties, before formalizing a partnership and delivering training.

Peer-to-peer recruitment can be highly effective. During project implementation, an informal recruiting approach emerged as some entrepreneurs began to refer others in their network. This strategy helped the project team by identifying qualified entrepreneurs and reducing the need for active recruitment. Thus far, three new entrepreneurs have been recruited through those networks.

Quickly establish expectations.

Setting expectations early in the recruitment process can help weed out entrepreneurs who are not ready to commit to sanitation before the project invests significant human and financial resources in training and follow-up. SSD has found it helpful to have partner entrepreneurs sign a collaboration agreement that details expectations for all parties.

Maintain partnerships only with entrepreneurs whose work meets quality standards. In the early stages of developing a market for new products, some amount of business turnover is inevitable. The bigger risk is with businesses that continue to sell few toilets, without a real commitment to the business or focus on quality service. Entrepreneurs who are trained should be continually reassessed to ensure quality standards are met, and those that do not meet expectations, even after coaching and support, should be formally separated from the project.

Way Forward

Recruiting the right entrepreneurs to partner with the project is challenging, but it is one of the most important factors for success. Iteration on our recruitment approaches has helped the project to find entrepreneurs that have both capacity and interest in building their sanitation businesses.

Involving municipalities continues to be crucial, as the prospect of creating new jobs and economic activity generates broad support from officials. Drawing on our experiences in Abidjan, however, the project also conducts its own screening of entrepreneurs who are referred. Some municipalities have turned to existing professional organizations to recruit entrepreneurs, which is a promising approach for future recruitment.

In the Municipality of Daloa, for example, officials recruited five qualified entrepreneurs from a professional organization, and four out of the five are still active. The project will continue to document and share different approaches to attracting highly motivated and capable entrepreneurs to the sanitation sector. SSD uses a market-based approach to increase access to sanitation by building the capacity of local entrepreneurs to provide products and services that meet the needs of potential customers.

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References

2016 JMP-UNICEF Report

<https://washdata.org/data/household#!/>

About PSI

Population Services International (PSI) is a global nonprofit organization that focuses on making it easier for people in the developing world to lead healthier lives and plan the families they desire. PSI was founded in 1970 to improve reproductive health using commercial marketing strategies and has expanded to work in over 50 countries in the areas of malaria, sexual & reproductive health, HIV, sanitation and non-communicable diseases. PSI is headquartered in Washington, DC

About Sanitation Service Delivery

The Sanitation Service Delivery Program (SSD) is designed to improve sanitation outcomes for the urban and peri-urban poor through developing and testing scalable, market-based models that contribute to structural change within the region's sanitation sector.

Our Partners



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