

Cambodians can now build toilets, Ikea-style

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SINGAPORE — Thanks to Singapore groups, some villages in Cambodia can now buy toilets Ikea-style: The parts for building a latrine with a shelter are delivered to villagers for self-assembly.

The materials used are also modified. For instance, the concrete mix is thinned, but ash is added to improve the quality.

All these efforts go towards lowering the cost of a toilet, which can range from under US\$100 (\$138) to as much as US\$500 — giving more Cambodians direct access to sanitation.

The project is a tie-up between Singapore-based non-governmental organisations Lien Aid and World Toilet Organisation, as well as the United States Agency for International Development's (USAid) WaterShed programme.

The project seeks to provide 537 villages in Cambodia's Kampong Speu province with their own toilets.

Cambodia, with a population of about 14 million, has one of Asia's lowest rates of access — under one in five, according to 2005 figures from Unicef — to direct sanitation.

With up to US\$300,000 in funding, Lien Aid developed do-it-yourself toilets, based on feedback from locals on their preferences.

According to project manager of Cambodia Lyn McLennan, villagers like the look of concrete, rather than plastic, for the walls. "It doesn't matter how poor people are, they still aspire to have things they are proud to own," she said. A model of it



Top left: The DIY toilet being built. Top right and above: The finished product.

is on display at the World Toilet Summit at Suntec Singapore until Friday.

The focus is on villagers who earn about US\$2 to US\$5 a day and have disposable income, rather than the "poorest of the poor" who earn less than US\$1 a day, noted Mr Tom Outlaw, the chief of party of the WaterShed initiative.

The scheme leverages on social entrepreneurs and small businesses to develop, manufacture and market the sanitation

products for sale, which is more effective than just giving free toilets, he added.

By 2013, the team aims to provide affordable sanitation for at least 100,000 people and access to safe water for one million in Cambodia, he said.

Lien Aid has a scheme for families to pool their funds to buy latrines, and works with the Cambodian government to get people to "confront the impact of defecating in the open", said Ms McLennan.