



Income generating activities for hygiene promotion

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A MAJOR CONSTRAINT faced by the Water and Environmental Sanitation (WES) Programme in Nigeria is the level of poor hygiene and sanitation practices due to high level of poverty. There is also a persistent lack of hygiene supportive facilities, political commitment, and items to encourage the continuous practice of safe hygiene and sanitation. This situation helps maintain a vicious cycle of poor hygiene, poor health and poverty.

This condition persists, despite all efforts and strategies including the selection and training of village level volunteers as Sanitation Artisans, Sani centre Managers and Hygiene/Sanitation Promoters. These workers are expected to ensure continuity in:

- information flow on basic hygiene and sanitation practices at the village level;
- provision of sanitary latrines and other sanitation facilities; and
- provision of other hygiene and sanitation services through the community Sani centre.

Due to the fact that these community level workers are termed volunteers, they are not remunerated. Consequently, their level of commitment and interest in the tasks expected of them depreciates with the passage of time. Their work also comes second to other activities that contribute to the sustenance of their families. Consequently there is a high defaulter rate among the trained volunteers. It is not surprising that their output has continued to fall.

One of the strategies supported by UNICEF through her partners in tackling these problems is the training of the workers on income generating skills, especially on the production and sale of basic hygiene and sanitation items such as low cost latrine slabs, soap, detergent and pomade.

The paper discusses the mode of implementation of this strategy in some communities, its reception by the worker-beneficiaries, the impact on their livelihood generally and on their roles and activities as voluntary workers. The paper also discusses how the following benefits can be achieved using the strategy:

- Intensification of the fight against poverty in Nigeria
- Escalation of the construction of latrines in the rural areas
- Increase in the level of Hygiene and Sanitation promotion activities at the community level
- Attraction and or increase in the level of sustainable participation of communities in WES activities

- Utilization as a mode of entry into communities and LGAs.

The paper concludes with the finding that strongly supports the adoption of this strategy as a mode of strengthening the community level volunteers in their activities as well as promoting the affordability, and availability of essential sanitation items in the beneficiary communities.

Community level volunteers

The volunteers are ordinary community people, nominated by the beneficiary community and trained to provide and promote WES services within the community. The services provided and promoted by the volunteers depend on what they were selected and trained for. As follows:

- **Hygiene and Sanitation Promoters:** Village Health Promoters, (VHPs) are women selected and trained to give, on a continuous basis, hygiene messages and ideas to fellow villagers, especially women, using such strategies as interpersonal health talks, village meetings, hygiene campaigns, etc. They also clean pump sites and ensure the orderly collection of water from the water point. In Primary schools, Environmental Health clubs, made up of pupils and teachers also exist to promote good hygiene practices among the school community. They promote the practice of good hygiene and also maintain WES facilities in schools.
- **Sani centre Managers:** These are members of the community trained to manage the community sanitation and hygiene resource centre, (the Sani centre). They include men and women. They sell sanitation and hygiene materials, give health talks as well as facilitate the construction of latrines.
- **Artisans:** These are trained in the fabrication of latrine slabs, construction of different types of latrines and, or routine maintenance/repair of water points.

Justification

The use of volunteers from the community increases the space for participation by the community in the programme. Spin off benefits from this, include imbuing in the community members a sense of ownership of the programme and facilities installed. Further enhancing transfer of technology and skills to community members and helping to enhance programme sustainability.

Remuneration

The WES programme volunteers have their families to sustain as well as other commitments to take care of. As volunteers they attract no overt remuneration. Initially, efforts were made to institute non-permanent, incentives for them. Some of these incentives included:

- Exemption from communal tasks and labour
- Exemption from payment of community instituted development levies

These incentives along the line were strengthened by such gestures as award of certificates, issue of Uniforms, ID cards, Bicycles, etc. These were provided by UNICEF and its partners.

Impact of incentives

Persistent poverty and family commitments render these incentives incapable of sustaining the interest of the community-based volunteers. The interest and commitment of the volunteers can be measured by their attendance at meetings and hygiene campaigns. Other indicators include output figures from their activities: households visited, health talks held, latrines constructed, number of water points with clean surroundings, etc.

The Imo State WES programme, assisted by UNICEF, started the selection and training of volunteers as early as 1983. Since then a total of 2,500 volunteers of different sexes and orientation have been trained in more than 150 communities in Imo State alone. The charts below show the yearly trend of outputs over a ten-year period, of Health Promoters trained in Mgbuisii, a community in Ohaji/Egbema LGA of Imo State, from 1983 to 1993 under only two indicators:

- Average number attending monthly meetings and Hygiene campaigns
- Number of water points with clean surroundings

The downward trend in each of these charts portrays the following scenario: The volunteers immediately after

training, graduation/award of certificates; manifest a high level of enthusiasm and interest in their activities. The euphoria of their training and ceremonial handover to their communities was able to motivate them in the first few months. With the passage of time (especially in the absence of follow up activities, remuneration or more tangible incentives), there occur a depreciation in the initial enthusiasm. Quite a number of them lose interest and become inactive. Another set is rendered inactive due to the amount of time spent in family upkeep activities. This is the universal situation in most communities participating in the WES programme in Nigeria.

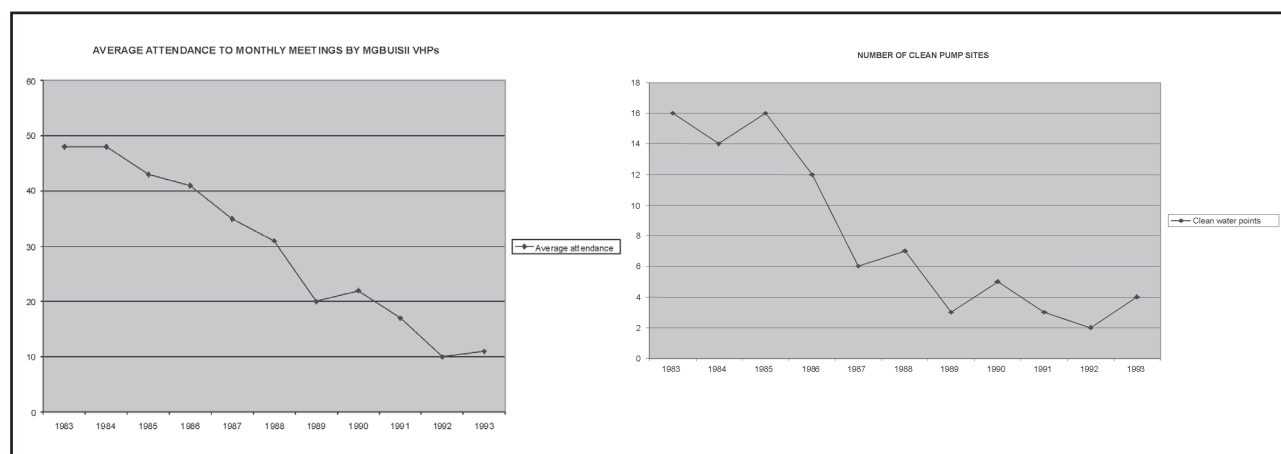
Further analysis of field reports indicate the following:

- A feeling that the job, since unremunerated, is not important or worth appreciating
- UNICEF, its partners and the beneficiary communities have not been able to establish sustainable means of encouraging the volunteers
- Public derision at the community level, against the volunteers for doing a job that has no attached *pay* nor equipped with the power of sanction.

New approaches

Along the line it became necessary to design new ways of encouraging the volunteers in order to rekindle and sustain their interest. The search was narrowed to strategies that meet the following criteria:

- **Sustainability:** Ability to be self-sustaining once activated. This will create a situation where the need for regular maintenance by UNICEF or its partners will not arise.
- **Community/Participant driven:** The Volunteers themselves will be in the driver's position to ensure the continued success and growth of the scheme.
- **WES supportive:** Ability, of the identified strategy, to be in sync with the contents, facilities and services of the WES programme.



- **Empowerment:** The strategy should be able to financially/materially empower the Volunteers, especially the women members among them.
- **Recognition/Acceptance:** The strategy should also be capable of enhancing the social status of the Volunteers, especially in the way other community members perceive them. This will fill the need for recognition and appreciation among them.
- UNICEF carries out follow-up monitoring and supervision through the WES Agency partners and the local SAT.

Inputs

For the implementation of this strategy, the following inputs are made:

- UNICEF: Training allowances, supply of some chemicals such as Palm Kernel Oil (PKO), caustic soda, foaming agent, soap production moulds, table with cutter and liner, latrine slab moulds, etc.
- State WES Agency: other production equipment, chemicals, sand, gravel, rod, cement, logistics, training allowances, etc.
- LGAs: Chemicals, sand, cement, gravel, logistics, etc.
- Beneficiary community: Training Venue, water, etc.

Strategy of income generating activities

The following income generating activities are on going in line with the criteria above:

- Production and sale of washing soap, detergent and pomade using affordable materials and equipment. The beneficiaries of this strategy are Village Health Promoters. In some communities in the country, organized groups such as **Girls Brigade**, involved in sanitation and hygiene promotion, have also benefited. In Imo State, through the assistance of UNICEF, a total of 300 women from 6 communities have so far benefited from this aspect of the programme.
- Fabrication and sale of various options of low technology latrine slabs. Sanitation artisans are the beneficiaries of this strategy. This programme has benefited more than 600 men from 100 communities in Imo State alone.
- Production and sale of soya bean milk to pupils. This is designed for Health Clubs in Primary schools. Apart from yielding money to the Clubs, the strategy helps to improve the nutritional status of pupils. Environmental Health clubs in some primary schools in Benue State have been assisted by UNICEF to implement this strategy.

Methodology of implementation

- Identification of the beneficiary community and sensitization of the volunteers
- Identification of locally available Skills Acquisition Trainer (SAT), and agreeing on appropriate technology to adopt. For training in latrine slab fabrication, the WES Agency staff have the manpower to conduct the training.
- Procurement/fabrication of production equipment and moulds
- Procurement of take-off batch of raw materials such as chemicals (for soap, detergent and pomade), sand, gravel and cement (for latrine slabs)
- Scheduling and conduct of the training. The training is usually practical oriented. The items such as soap bars, detergent powder, Jars of pomade or latrine slabs are produced during the training process. The proceeds from the sale of this first batch of products form the initial take-off grant to the beneficiaries. Conscious efforts are made to ensure that the volunteers at this stage adopt the attitude of maximizing profit from the operation. The Volunteers exist as a group after the training. They buy production materials, produce the items and sell to members of the public.

Impact

- Improved availability of sanitation items:** Washing soap, detergent and pomade needed for basic hygiene activities as hand washing, after the introduction of the programme, become more available in the communities. The prices of these items are also within the reach of the community members. In Umutanze, Orlu LGA, Imo State, a length of soap that used to sell for eighty Naira, the VHPs now produce and sell for fifty Naira. There is a rush for the items produced by the VHPs in the community because of their acclaimed high quality. During the harmattan, in Aguneze community of Ahiazu Mbaise LGA of Imo State, people now prefer to use **WESLINE**, the brand of pomade produced under the programme by the women Health promoters, because of its soothing effect on the skin.
- Increase in Latrine construction:** The fabrication and sale of slabs in the community by the sanitation artisans make the construction of latrines especially at the household level easier and cheaper. This has impacted positively on the number of latrines constructed in the beneficiary communities.
- Increased opportunities for interaction:** The volunteers meet, interact and encourage each other on the product production days. These help to boost their morale as well as sustain a higher level of interest in their activities. Consequently it becomes easier for their leaders to get them together to execute their other normal activities that record less number of defaulters.
- Increased individual net earnings:** Proceeds from the production and sale of the items have helped to increase the net income of the volunteers as individuals. Apart from sharing the profits periodically, some of the more enterprising among them have become retailers of the items they produce.
- Self Confidence building:** At the end of the day, a simple programme converts ordinary people into *experts* in one activity area or the other. Formally unskilled women

soon become *industrialists*. The confidence this generates in the women is portrayed in their *born-again*, neater appearances, more smile dimples and less worry lines on their faces.

- f) **Popularity for WES:** The strategy has also rubbed off positively on WES. Issues of hygiene and sanitation have been made more perceptible. Hand washing with quality soap produced within the community by *known* community members no more poses a difficult habit to promote. Building a latrine using slabs fabricated in the community by ordinary community members becomes an easier possibility.

Other areas of application

The WES programme has recorded success in the use of this strategy in encouraging its volunteers. The volunteers are encouraged to devote as much time to their primary assignment, which is WES service provision and promotion. Consequently, routine WES activities such as house to house visits, marketing of sanitation items at the Sani centre, provision of sanitary latrines go hand in hand with the production of such basic sanitation items as bar soap, detergent, pomade and latrine slabs. The experience gained during its implementation has thrown up some other possibilities for the use of the strategy.

- **As an entry strategy into new communities:** the programme impacts quickly and directly on community

members. It has a message that community members can understand without much emphasis. Consequently, many, including non-WES communities have requested for it. More communities are now ready to fulfil all necessary conditions in order to collaborate with the WES programme. Consequently, the strategy has graduated from a rear guard soldier to an advance trooper, able to neutralize initial resistance to programme acceptance by community members. Today in Imo State, Umutanze and Aguneze are very strong in hygiene and sanitation aspects of WES. The option of using income generating activities for selected women was used as entry strategy into the communities.

- **Advocacy tool:** The strategy has also been utilized as a tool to sell WES activities to local govt. authorities. Elected local govt. officers, always on the lookout for opportunities to enhance electoral gains have not failed to see the potentials of this strategy in bringing them closer to the hearts of community members. WES on its part has not failed to see the potentials of this situation in generating support for hygiene and sanitation activities in the communities.

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