

Fighting Hygiene and Sanitation Taboos in Southern Ethiopia

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Promoting Behavior Change in Pastoral Communities

Major challenges threatening pastoralists today are a decline in resource availability and recurrent drought which are both exacerbated by increasing conflict and population pressure. A specific barrier to achieving gains in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector is the lack of appropriate development policy to address the pastoral way of life. Since these communities are highly mobile, adequate WASH is often difficult to practice. Therefore, interventions must recognize the inherent challenges and needs related to feasible and sustainable WASH practices for their lifestyle.

Miyo district is an extremely remote area in the Borana Zone of Southern Ethiopia inhabited largely by pastoralist communities. A large component of the Global Water Initiative (GWI) in Miyo is to influence change from current sanitation and hygiene practices towards total transformation to safe WASH practices and increased access to clean water. However, GWI partners found that providing the training and infrastructure such as latrines did not directly lead to behavior change due to social norms and beliefs, or taboos, which are entrenched in the local culture. GWI partner CARE Ethiopia implemented a variety of WASH tools and techniques to address some of the cultural taboos that were preventing positive behavior change in these communities:

- Formation of three types of committees at the community level to take on different WASH related issues: WASH Committee (WASHCO), Community Water and Hygiene Promoters (CWASHP), and Latrine Management Committees.
- Combination of Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation (PHAST), Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) and School-Led Total Sanitation (SLTS).
- WASH-themed night video showings in the communities and dramatic plays by youth were interactive and stimulating ways to reach a large number of people at once.
- Students led sanitation campaigns at the village level to raise sanitation and hygiene awareness during peak times of community gatherings and activity. Demonstrators carried signs with slogans to reach the wider community during market days.

Community Adoption of WASH Practices in Miyo District



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Measuring GWI Impact

In order to evaluate the impact of the GWI program on effectively promoting behavior change around WASH, CARE conducted a research study in November of 2009 in three pastoral communities of the Miyo district: Hidi Babo, Boku Luboma and Cheri Turura. The study entitled "Documentation of Best Practices: Achievements on Hygiene and Sanitation by the GWI program in the Miyo District of Borana Zone" aimed to identify and analyze overall behavior change regarding household use of latrines and practice of general sanitation.

Methodology: CARE staff conducted the study with a sample of 45 households in the three communities. The study methodology included the following: open-ended questionnaires, focus group discussions, transect walks (visual observation), key informants interviews, case studies and human interest stories, and photographs and video footage. The study applied both qualitative and descriptive statistical data analysis to compile findings. The study compared GWI intervention sites against non-GWI sites to compare differences in local practices. An annual inventory of sanitation facilities in 2010 and 2011 supported the study to compare changes in WASH infrastructure over time.

Examples of household latrine use



Major findings: The study found that prior to GWI, open defecation was the predominant practice and use of latrines was socially restricted. Community members identified the use of latrines as taboo and thus undesirable. This taboo stems from an ancient spiritual belief that someone who buries their feces is considered as an evil wisher and becomes a social outcast. A common phrase encountered is "Nu nagaa qabna" which translates in English to "We are people of peace, we do not use latrines." Other practices such as people and animals cohabiting in the same room and lack of a separate kitchen area for food preparation are among the common local practices that increase the risk of disease. WASH facilities provided by the government or development program were not being used because they were deemed as socially unacceptable.

Based on the annual inventory results of 2010, there were 370 household latrines present in the target communities. However the 2011 inventory shows a vast increase in sanitation facility coverage with a total of 5,405 sanitation facilities constructed in GWI target areas:

- 1,592 household latrines
- 1,351 separate kitchens
- 1,594 separate livestock rooms
- 864 waste disposal pits

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Accordingly, the study found that latrine use, waste disposal pits, and separate rooms for domestic duties are being used at higher rates than prior to GWI. Social norms are shifting and the practice of open defecation is increasingly regarded as inappropriate; social pressure is encouraging change of this behavior.

Lessons and Recommendations

Entrenched community practices and beliefs are very difficult to transform in a short period of time. Thus, a long-term program such as GWI is required to promote behavior change over an extended timeframe. In order to fight taboos around WASH, a variety of sanitation promotion tools and approaches should be combined that address the mobility of pastoralist communities. In addition, publically recognizing change agents in the community and providing them awards for being role model households can be effective in encouraging others and fostering a sense of healthy competition.

In order to build on the successes of the previous phase of GWI programming, the following steps are recommended:

- Strengthen capacity of established Latrine Management Committees, CWASHP and WASHCO through refresher trainings on environmental sanitation and regular follow-up on their challenges and achievements. These groups should be linked with government resources such as community health workers for sustainability and scale-up of best practice activities.
- Monitor use of latrines and other sanitation facilities to ensure sustainability and proper maintenance.
- Embed GWI WASH activities in to the traditional Borana Gada system. The Gada is a traditional institution with the authority to oversee social, political, and resource management activities. The participation and support of traditional leaders in the sanitation promotion activities is crucial.
- Continue building on the positive momentum of night video showings, dramatic plays, youth campaigns and recognition of role model households. These techniques have been influential in helping communities move towards total transformation of their sanitation behavior.

Examples of household latrine construction and use

