

MAXIMIZING THE BENEFITS FROM WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

Promoting Women's Hygiene in Emergency Situations

E Bwengye-Kahororo and Ms. E Twanza, Uganda

The women living in IDP camps face various problems including lack of privacy during urinating, defecation and menstruation. Concern World Wide and UNICEF worked together to promote hygiene education among women to enable them manage their personal hygiene relating to menstruation. A total of 35,000 women living in 7 IDP camps participated in the project. Hygiene education was carried out and backed with hygiene supplies that included pieces of cotton cloth to use as sanitary pads, 3 pairs of underwear, soap, basin and construction of 96 bathing shelters. A monitoring visit revealed some major achievements of the project that included improved management of personal hygiene with dignity and privacy, addressing the reproductive health issues and sexual gender-based violence and improved classroom attendance among the girls. The project had some constraints mainly brought about by age differences, movements of IDPs and using some of the items for other pressing needs. The project recommends similar efforts to be replicated in other IDP situations. UNICEF and partners adopted the approach for the IDPs in Northern Uganda.

Introduction and background

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) extended their operations to the neighbouring districts of Katakwi, Soroti and Kaberamaido in June 2003, resulting in massive displacement of about 400,000 people into internally displaced people's camps (IDPs). The IDPs faced several problems that included scarcity of water, inadequate sanitation and hygiene facilities, living space, food, firewood, clothing and shelter. The discussion focuses on how UNICEF and Concern worked together to address the hygiene requirements relating to menstruation.

The problem

The problem to be addressed was that women living in IDP camps in Soroti Municipality and Katakwi district were unable to handle their menstruation with the appropriate level of dignity, privacy and materials. The living conditions in IDP camps were particularly difficult for women due to overcrowding (about 100 people sharing and sleeping in a classroom at night); about 1,000 people sharing one bathing shelter hence they lacked:

- Padding materials such as pieces of cotton cloth or cotton wool because at the time of displacement women could not carry their basic sanitary materials with them while fleeing from LRA attack on villages.
- Privacy as women are forced to live in cramped and congested conditions in any available space such as uncompleted houses, schools, churches and small huts. Furthermore, access to bathing shelters was limited leading to an acute lack of privacy, especially during menstruation. Bathing and/or cleaning was only possible

at night, when it was dark. This increased the risks of rape and the consequences of sexually transmitted infections.

- Mechanism to hold padding materials during menstruation.
- Soap and basins to maintain personal hygiene during menstruation.
- Practical skills to manage menstruation especially among the young girls as some of the available parents fear to talk to them on issues of growing up.

All these problems led the women to adopt peculiar coping mechanisms whenever menstruation occurred that created even more problems, such as staining bathing rooms with menstrual blood, spending extra time in the bathing shelters waiting for their pieces of cloth or knickers to dry so they can change. This led to increasing inability among such women to fulfil household tasks at the right time as they hid in the houses in fear of children and men laughing at them and/or teasing them. Other coping styles included borrowing padding materials from each other but without consent of the owners.

How the problem was addressed

It was against this background that Concern World Wide with support from UNICEF was approached to address the issue. A pilot arrangement was carried out with fewer women and in fewer camps to try out approaches of reaching the women without abusing their integrity and to determine possible interventions and supply requirements. The major interventions identified included: formation and training

women’s group committee leaders, in hygiene education and how to effectively manage menstruation in an IDP camp setting, purchase and distribution of underwear, cotton cloth, basins and soap, construction of 96 bathing shelters for use by women to improve their personal hygiene and monitoring and evaluation. A total of Uganda Shillings 363,368,790/= (US\$ 204,140: exch. Rate \$1=1680/=) was invested in the project to address the needs of 35,000 internally displaced women in seven IDP camps.

Results of implementation

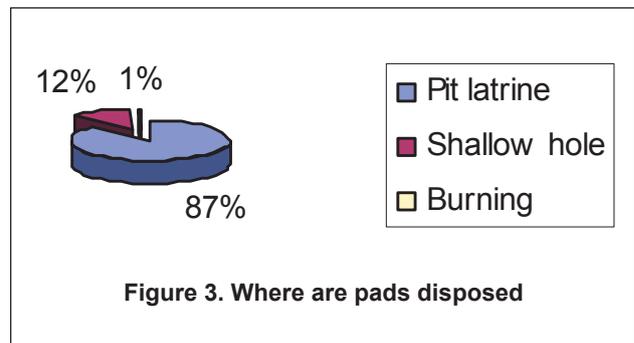
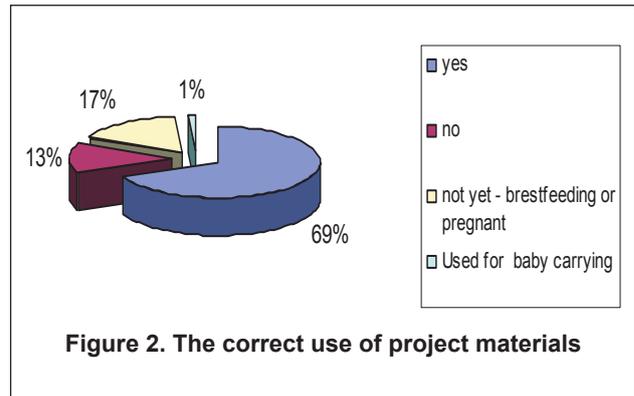
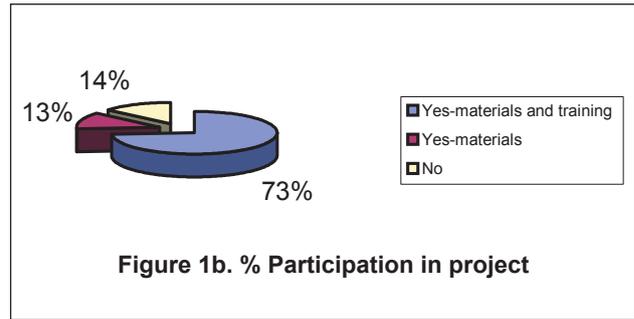
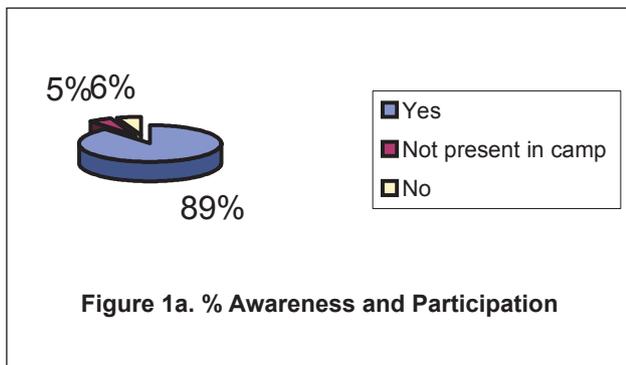
A rapid monitoring exercise using structured questions was carried out among two hundred and eighty nine project participants from four target sub-counties in Soroti and Katakwi Districts. The aim was to determine progress towards achieving the project objective. The data collected is presented for each project objective:

- To sensitise and train 350 internally displaced women leaders (who in turn would train other project participants) on issues relating to proper menstruation management in the selected IDP camps in Soroti and Katakwi.
- To provide sanitary materials and facilities, to the internally displaced women in the selected camps in Soroti and Katakwi.
- To contribute to improved livelihoods among the internally displaced women.
- To maximise the benefits of the Sanitary Pad project in increasing awareness among these women on domestic and personal hygiene, HIV/AIDS awareness

Training

Participants were asked if they were aware of the project or had participated in trainings. Figure 1 indicates the following

- 89% of internally displaced women in the target area were able to correctly describe the project goals and existence.
- 73% of internally displaced women in the target area were trained in effective menstruation management skills.
- 86% of internally displaced women interviewed participated in the project of which 15% received no training.



Appropriateness of the training

The success of the training and of the project in general can be measured by the actual use of the materials distributed. Figure 2 shows the percentage of materials that are being used for the intended purpose. Only 14% of internally displaced women were not using the materials for their intended purpose. The pregnant and lactating mother’s interviewed said that they would use the items to address their menstruation needs when they required them.

Figure 3 demonstrates that the important environmental consideration of appropriate disposal of used materials was sufficiently addressed during the training. It was reported that about 87% of internally displaced women participating in the project dispose the materials safely into a latrine.

Distribution

About 89% of internally displaced women that participated in the survey received all the items and 5% of internally displaced women missed the distribution of the items as they were absent at the time of distribution.

Appropriateness of Items Distributed

Field monitoring visit indicates that about 86% of the adult women living in IDP camps who have used the items to date found them satisfactory and appropriate. The results however indicate that a certain proportion of youths (12%) would prefer conventional sanitary padding materials, unlike the adult women. The finding is probably because of influence from school, where modern materials are used. The adult women participating in the project who used the project-provided materials reported increased interaction with others even during the menstruation episode. This indicates that the materials distributed have made a significant contribution towards improving the dignity of women living in IDP camps.

Possible improvements on lives of women in IDP camps

Participants were asked if they experienced any improvements in their life, work or education as a result of the participation in the project. Some of the responses were:

1. The organisation of women into groups and the training in various aspects created confidence among women to improve personal hygiene practices and to deal with reproductive health issues,
2. Improved dignity and appearance enabling participants to fulfil their traditional gender roles in society with greater dignity,
3. Improved quality of materials used during menstruation,
4. 5% of girls indicated continuous attendance of classes, that used to be interrupted during menstruation'
5. The 96 bathing shelters increased privacy and convenience among the women. The need to bath at night is no long an issue.

Recognised improvements to the lives in internally displaced women

While the data collected during the monitoring visit indicates some improvement among the social lives of participating women one cannot conclude that the menstruation management project was the only effort that contributed to this improvement. The data however points to the fact that the participating women are able to fulfil their expected roles and responsibilities with greater dignity and the girls had increasing potential access to education and income generating activities.

Other benefits accruing from participation of the project:

Increased awareness on HIV/AIDS

The interaction with women living in IDP camps in this project offered an opportunity to raise a number of larger issues, particularly in relation to gender based violence (GBV) and dependence, HIV infection and AIDS prevention. For example about 25% of women reported that the project contributed to reduced dependency on their husbands and

other men to provide money for basic needs.

Construction of bathing shelters

A total of 96 bathing shelters were constructed for women living in 7 IDP camps. The monitoring visit however, revealed that some women often engaged in extra marital sexual relationships to raise resources to provide for other basic needs. The project constructed bathing shelters reduced the risk of being raped at night, since bathing was now possible during the day.

Constraints and lessons learnt

This was the first of its kind and is being replicated by UNICEF and other humanitarian agencies in the IDP camps in Northern Uganda despite the following constraints:

Trickle down does not always work well

The hygiene education training anticipated employing a cascade system whereby the trained women would in turn train others. This arrangement failed. Instead of training 350 women, the project invested more resources to train 1,542 women leaders to create a critical mass of resource persons that would carry out similar hygiene education. More resources were therefore invested in training than originally envisaged.

IDP movements from camp to new camps

As the security situation improved, some IDPs moved and created smaller camps nearer home, to access their gardens and other property. This resulted in the "loss" of some project participants and the project had to start afresh. The worst situation was an attempt for some of the participants to receive supplies from several camps.

The girls reluctant to use non-conventional methods

The young girls (13-18 years olds) were reluctant to use pieces of cloth as sanitary pads. They preferred to use the conventional pads that were not part of the project-provided supplies. Those in schools looked down upon the old women who have never gone to school. The children looked at the pieces of cloth that were to be used as pads as being meant for illiterate and older women.

Diverting of items for other uses

The two metres of cotton cloth provided to the women was in some cases used for pressing alternative needs such as carrying babies, bed sheets. There were no reports of selling the materials however.

Criteria for participating in the project questioned

The older women who fall outside the child-bearing age of 49 years old were excluded and they challenged this criterion. Their feeling was that, they could still get the materials and use them for something else. Nevertheless, all women and men irrespective of participating in the project had access to separate bathing shelters.

Conclusion, sustainability and appropriateness of the project approach

The IDP life is not a long term and the project team did not wish to see these camps as a sustainable structure. All the major interventions in the hygiene promotion project were highly temporary. It is true that to reduce dependency on the project, efforts were made to promote hygiene methods that were already used by the women, before displacement. In normal communities, older women use pieces of cloth as sanitary pads because their great grand mothers used them; they are readily available at no cost and reusable over a long period of time. Whilst it is not possible to determine this over the short period since materials were distributed, the correct use of the materials may be sustainable. It is also clear that for the project to be sustainable the most appropriate materials needed to be distributed. About 71% of reported reuse of their materials until they are worn out indicating a high reutilisation of the materials and therefore making the replacement of these materials affordable to the target group in the long term. Other supplies like soap, basins are readily available in even the remotest part of the country provided the people have money to purchase them.

The high percentage of people were satisfied with the project materials and hence the project concept, indicates that women will be willing to replace the perishable materials over time. Women's ability to replace the materials will be dependent on the access to improved incomes. It is important to further develop the linkages between the project and access to income as an encouragement to internally displaced women to reinvest their scarce resources to meet their basic sanitary needs.

The project has some kind of multiplier-effects. The simple training in personal hygiene, backed by providing the needed supplies to put the acquired knowledge into practice increased awareness among the women on other issues that affect their lives such as HIV and reproductive tract infection prevention, passing on messages to each other and to their children and spouses. For many internally displaced women, their personal safety and security is partly dependent on these issues being adequately addressed.

When internally displaced women were asked how the project could be improved if extended to other districts, 80% said that it should be extended to other areas in its present form or with an increased number of materials further confirming the appropriateness of the project. The most common project improvements recommended included the following:

- the introduction of modern materials for younger women
- Inclusion of refresher training.
- Integrate the project with income generating activities to improve the livelihoods of women as well as improve their ability to provide the hygiene materials on their own. This would reduce dependency on projects and their spouses for hygiene supplies. This is particularly the case for female headed households.

In summary, women unlike the men living in IDP camps are significantly affected by lack of hygiene facilities. They require relatively more privacy particularly during menstruation and clean and familiar padding materials, and the related facilities to effectively manage their personal hygiene. Unless hygiene education training is not backed-up with the necessary supplies and using appropriate methodologies, it is likely to be diluted effort. Therefore, resources need to be invested in non- conventional sanitation interventions to address the unique requirements of women living in IDP camps. The materials used may not be universally accepted by all the project participants. Continuous hygiene education and clarification are required to achieve the objectives.

Contact address

Edward Bwengye-Kahororo
Project Officer
UNICEF Uganda, Off Kyagwe Road Kisozi House, P.O.Box 7047, Kampala, Uganda

Ms. Eunice Twanza
Project Officer
Concern-Soroti, Emergency, Water and Sanitation Project, P.O.Box 266, Soroti
