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**WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE:
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND MULTISECTORAL APPROACHES**

**Mobilizing people for improved hygiene practices
through hand washing campaigns in Nigeria**

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The level of hygiene practices is generally low in Nigeria. There are no available data for measuring hygiene practices; the best information is through proxy indicator of access to hand washing facilities such as water, soap and basin. It is estimated that 43% of the population has access to hand washing facilities. The poor level of hygiene practices among the people can be attributed to; low level of awareness; low level of priority and funding of hygiene education and promotion; Weak and poorly enforced public health laws; Poorly motivated sector professionals and weak human resources. Addressing the poor level of hygiene practices requires mass mobilization of people towards creating awareness for the desired behavioural change. In Nigeria, hand washing campaigns have been instrumental to mobilizing people for improved hygiene practices and based on the successes recorded, the campaigns have been adopted as a major strategy for effective hygiene promotion.

Background

Based on 2006 census, Nigeria's population is estimated at 140 million distributed in 774 Local Government Areas of the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory. Over half of this population reside in rural communities of less than 5,000. There are four major ethnic groups in the country; Fulani, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and as many as 350 languages and dialects are spoken across the country. Each of this group has distinct social and cultural values which influence the way they behave as it relates to hygiene practices.

While data are easily available on access to improved water sources and sanitation, the best information for measuring hygiene practices is through the proxy indicator of access to hand washing facilities such as water, soap and basin. The 2004 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) estimated that 43% of the population has access to hand washing facilities. Generally, from mere observations and field experience, the level of hygiene practices is very low among the people. This situation is further compounded with low level of access to improved sanitation which according to the 2008 Joint Monitoring Programme Report of WHO and UNICEF is estimated at 30% with over 20% practicing open defecation. The direct consequences of these low levels of hygiene practices and sanitation are high mortality and morbidity rates especially among children. The 2007 UNICEF State of the World's Children Report puts infant and under-five mortality rates at 100 and 194 per 1,000 live births which are one of the worst in sub-Saharan Africa. Diarrhoea which is a sanitation and hygiene related disease is the second main cause of infant mortality, after malaria and the third main cause of under five mortality in the country. An estimated 200,000 diarrhoea – related deaths occur among children below 5 each year.

Nigeria reported the first case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in February 2006 and so many states have been affected. Based on available information, the virus is mainly circulating among the birds and only one human case has been reported so far. Avian Influenza like many other communicable diseases poses a lot of enormous challenges to the health, economic and social well being of the people and these can partly be mitigated through improved hygiene practice such as hand washing with water and soap.

Efforts at promoting effective hygiene practices have been piecemeal and have not been effective enough to engender the required mass behaviour change due to a combination of factors, some of which include; Low level of awareness on effect of unhygienic practices; Low level of priority and funding of hygiene

education and promotion activities; Unfavourable policy environment; Poor coordination; Weak and Poorly enforced public health laws; Poorly motivated sector professionals and Weak human resources.

Hand washing campaigns

Hand washing with soap has been proved scientifically to be effective in reducing the occurrence of diarrhoeal diseases. From various studies that have been carried out on the effect of hand washing on diarrhoea occurrence, it is estimated that 30 to 44% reduction in diarrhoea episodes can be achieved. Hand washing with soap at critical moments has also been proved to be cost-effective and high impact intervention that can contribute significantly to reduction of child morbidity and mortality due to diarrhoeal diseases. Considering the numerous benefits of hand washing with soap, hand washing campaign was introduced as one of the strategies for hygiene promotion as part of Federal Government of Nigeria/UNICEF Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Programme in 2004. The campaigns have been designed targeting a cross-section of audience including children. The broad objectives of the campaigns include:

- To raise the level of awareness of hygiene and sanitation especially hand washing among the policy makers, children and general populace;
- To sensitize the policy makers, opinion/political leaders, traditional leaders and community members on hand washing as it relates to health and economic well being of the people;
- To advocate for more financial and political commitments for hygiene promotion: and
- To advocate for sustainable development of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene towards achieving the MDGs.

One of the main strategies of the campaigns is focusing on school children to act as agent of change to mobilize the larger communities for improved hygiene practices, hence the need for working with primary schools as entry points for effective hygiene promotion. At the commencement of this initiative in 2004, most of the activities were focused on few primary schools with resources mainly from UNICEF. Based on preliminary assessment in 2005, it was discovered that for the above objectives to be fully achieved, there was need to scale up the campaigns which would require more involvement of all relevant stakeholders and adopting multiple approaches for the campaigns. The campaigns were therefore repackaged without losing the focus on children but attracting more actors such as media, private sector, community leaders, traditional leaders, political leaders, NGOs and government establishments towards achieving mass mobilization for improved hygiene practices.

Mobilizing the private sector for the campaign yielded a positive result with additional funds of over US\$600,000 received from Unilever Nigeria Plc to scale up the project in 222 primary schools and communities from 2005 to 2008. The funds from Unilever were used to leverage more resources from governments and other major partners to widen the scope of the campaigns to cover the whole country and moving from school campaigns to reach other target audience such as policy makers, traditional leaders, opinion leaders and the general populace.

Multi-media approaches were adopted for the campaigns involving rallies and carnival; Development and production of Behavioural Change Communication Materials; Development and airing of jingles on radio and television; Documentary presentation on sanitation and hygiene on radio and television; Discussion programmes on Hygiene practices on radio and television; Drama; Features on Improved Hygiene practices in print media. The messages of the campaigns were consistent and designed to support the achievement of the set objectives.

Several of these campaigns have been organised in all the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory from inception to date. Towards achieving the set objectives, the campaigns were organized at School/Community level; Local Government level, State level, Zonal and National level. Due to the success recorded so far in the country in creating awareness on hygiene practices, hand washing campaigns to reach over 30 million people was adopted as one of the three targets for 2008 International Year of Sanitation in Nigeria.

Levels of the campaigns

School and community campaigns

These campaigns were organized in community schools with active participation of all the community members. The organizing committee for the campaigns comprised of; Representatives of Parents Teachers Association, Women Group, Head Teachers, Members of School Environmental Health Clubs. The campaigns were facilitated by the LGA Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Units and State Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agencies in collaboration with State Universal Basic Education Boards. In attendance during these campaigns were; the Traditional leaders, Political/Opinion leaders, Women Groups, School PTA Chairmen and Children. The School Environmental Health Clubs played active roles during and after the campaigns. The School Environmental Health Clubs' roles during the campaigns involved educating the audience with songs and short drama on hygiene practices especially hand washing while the club members were also involved in rallies and hygiene promotion within the communities as follow up to the campaigns. The campaigns were often marked with demonstration of hand washing with soap by the Chief Launcher/Special Guest of Honour which in most cases was the Traditional/Community leader. The campaigns also provided the opportunity of mobilizing support for provision of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene facilities and soaps for hand washings in schools. Over 222 communities and primary schools in all the 36 States and Federal Capital Territory have benefited from these campaigns.

State and LGA campaigns

Similar campaigns were organized at State and LGA level with focus mainly on the policy makers, political leaders, traditional leaders as well as children. These were higher level campaigns that attracted Local Government Chairmen and their Councillors; State Executive Governors and their Commissioners; Wives of State Governors; Media Executives; Women Leaders; and First Class Traditional leaders. These campaigns were launched by the State Executive Governors, Deputy Governors or their wives and provided the opportunity of mobilizing policy makers, senior government officials, politicians, community members on hygiene practices especially hand washing as well as attracting firm commitments for improved funding for hygiene promotion activities. The campaigns have been launched in 33 out of 36 States in the country and have contributed immensely to creating of awareness among the populace and increased level of government funding of hygiene promotion activities. Most of the State and LGA campaigns were funded mainly by the governments with technical supports from UNICEF and other partners.

Zonal campaigns

These were organized for a cluster of States in a geographical zone in the country to further reinforce the messages and mobilize resources for hygiene promotion especially hand washing. The campaigns were mainly organized to mobilize wives of State governors and other top political leaders to support the hand washing campaigns. Apart from State level participation, representatives of Ministers of Federal Ministries also took part in these campaigns. Two zonal campaigns for the North West and North Eastern Zones have been organized and attracted wives and representatives of wives of State Executive governors from the part of the country.

National campaign

Although the hand washing campaigns have been organised since 2004, the campaigns were officially launched at Federal level by the wife of the President of Federal Republic of Nigeria on May 20, 2008. Also present at the launch were; the wife of the Vice-President, Minister of Environment, Housing and Urban Development; Minister of Women Affairs; Minister of State for Education; Minister of State for Environment, Housing and Urban Development; Permanent Secretaries of various government ministries; Chief Executive Officers of several government agencies and parastatals; Wives of Ministers and National Assembly members; Traditional leaders; and Heads of International Organizations. The event brought together sector practitioners from different ministries and agencies as well as International NGOs, CSOs, media, private sector, youths and school children.

The country took part in the first ever Global Hand washing day commemoration which took place on October 15, 2008 as part of the global initiative of promoting culture of hand washing with soap. Over 430 primary schools throughout the country took part in the Global Hand washing campaign with 150,000 children actually washing their hands on that day.

Media campaigns

As part of the efforts of reaching out to more people with hand washing messages, both electronic and print media were mobilized for the campaigns. The processes of engagement with media commenced with sensitization meetings with journalists across the country for proper understanding of hygiene related issues especially hand washing. Over 30 media organizations were sensitized with their skills enhanced on hygiene promotion. Jingles were produced on hand washing practices in both English and Local languages and these jingles were distributed to over 20 Radio and Television Stations for airing. The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) which is the largest television station in the country with network covering over 95% of the country and 101 stations in all the 36 States and FCT now airs the English version of the jingle.

Apart from the jingles, more than 12 radio and television stations have regular programs such as documentary, drama and live discussions on hygiene practices. Features and Stories on Improved hygiene practices have also been produced in print media towards creating awareness on benefits of hygiene practices such as hand washing among the populace.

Key achievements

The hand washing campaigns are major activities that are being implemented as part of the 2008 International Year of Sanitation. From inception of the hand washing initiatives to date, the following have been achieved:

- Over five million people including about one million children have been mobilized and sensitized on hygiene promotion through rallies and carnivals.
- Hand washing and other hygiene messages have been disseminated to over 90 million people through both electronic and print media.
- Contributed to raising the profile of hygiene promotion with more subscription from governments and other partners. Most of the campaigns were funded by governments at national and sub-national levels.
- Contributed to increase in Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices on hand washing and other hygiene practices especially in 222 primary schools and communities.
- Provided opportunities for mobilizing resources for implementation of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Projects in communities and schools.

Lessons learnt

- A critical mass of people that are well informed on hygiene promotion is needed at all levels to achieve improved hygiene practices among the people. The campaigns provide a viable platform for mobilizing people to take action to improve on their hygiene practices.
- Using multi-media approaches involving carnivals, rallies and media campaigns have contributed immensely to increase in awareness on hand washing as well as mobilizing both human and financial resources for effective hygiene promotion.
- Sustained advocacy and mobilization of policy makers, political and opinion leaders are required for both political and financial supports.
- A well packaged hand washing campaign can be used to mobilize resources from governments and other relevant stakeholders to implement other hygiene and sanitation projects.
- Working with children through the School Environmental Health Clubs has proved to be beneficial for hygiene promotion both in the schools and within the communities. The School campaigns provide the opportunity of mobilizing children including members of Environmental Health Clubs to be agents of change for improved hygiene practices.
- There are no cultural and religious barriers to the hand washing campaign across the country, hence its effectiveness in mobilizing people for improved hygiene practices.
- The hand washing campaigns provide opportunity of integrating other health and hygiene related issues such as Avian Influenza, Sanitation and Hygiene into hand washing messages.

Conclusion

The hand washing campaigns have been able to achieve the set objectives of creating awareness among the general populace and mobilizing both human and financial resources for hygiene promotion. The campaigns have brought together all relevant stakeholders to plan and implement hygiene promotion activities in the country.

As Avian Influenza becomes an ever greater risk in the country, the hand washing campaigns provide opportunity to once again reinforce the importance of hand washing with soap to reduce the risk of spread of this disease.

Achieving improved hygiene practices in the country requires sustained mass mobilization for creating awareness on the health benefit and mobilization of resources for effective hygiene promotion. The hand washing campaigns have become an effective platform for mobilizing people for improved hygiene practices and the campaigns are gradually being institutionalized and integrated into national plans.

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