

**41<sup>st</sup> WEDC International Conference, Egerton University, Nakuru, Kenya, 2018**

**TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE  
AND RESILIENT WASH SERVICES**

**Creating demand for safe human excreta disposal in a  
nomadic community: a case study of Riba location,  
Wajir county**

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**PAPER 2937**

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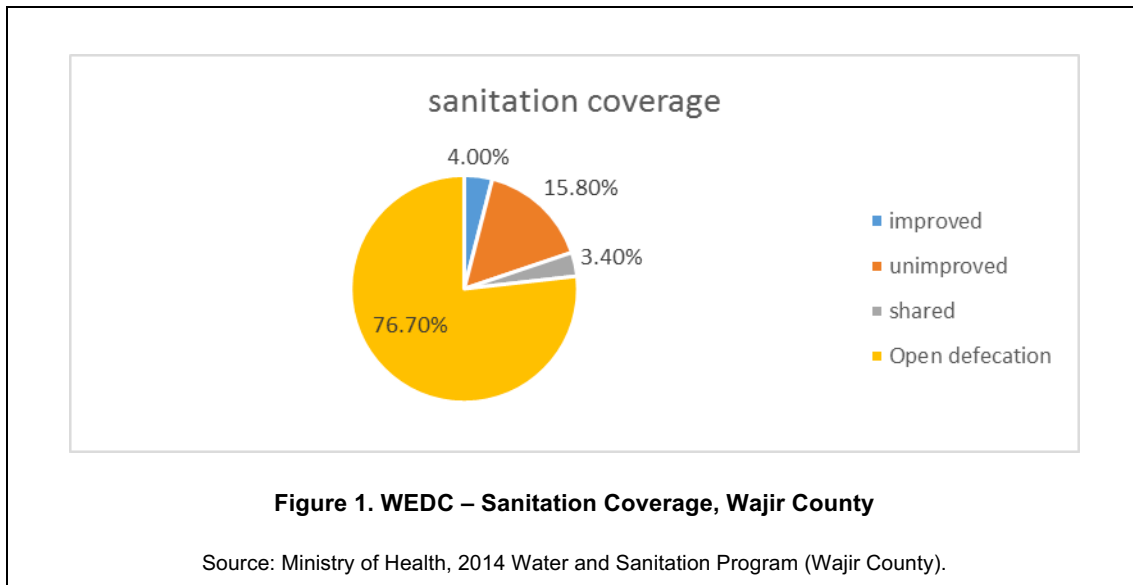
*Wajir South Development Association (WASDA) as one of the WASH actors in Wajir county, with support from Amref Health Africa in Kenya, has been implementing the Kenya Sanitation and Hygiene Improvement Programme (K-SHIP) funded by Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) through the Global sanitation Fund (GSF). The programme targeted the rural set ups in Wajir East, where communities majorly practice pastoralism. Though this lifestyle is viewed as maintaining the livelihood of communities, it presents significant health challenges and environmental pressures, especially where it is combined with nomadism. This paper presents the methods adopted to influence behaviour change to make the communities open defecation free (ODF) and lessons learnt during implementation of the program. The programme implementing team adopted several innovative approaches within the actual CLTS approach to overcome these barriers. Customizing the timing of triggering where CLTS activities are mainly intensified during the rainy seasons with post-triggering follow ups done at dawn and dusk targeting household heads, involvement of religious leaders and school children and empowering women played a big role in achieving several ODF villages.*

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**Introduction**

Wajir is a county in the former North Eastern Province of Kenya. Its capital and largest town is Wajir. The county has a population of 661,941 and an area of 55,840.6 km<sup>2</sup>. The county has six constituencies: Wajir North, Wajir West, Wajir East, Wajir South, Tarbaj and Eldas. The climate is characterized by long dry spells and short rainy seasons. The inhabitants of the county are mainly Somalis whose main lifestyle is pastoralism with livestock rearing forming the backbone of the economy. The socio-economic status of the county is low, with constant loss of livestock to either frequent droughts or rustling during clan clashes.

The County has been rated at 44 out of the 47 counties in the sanitation bench marking by the Ministry health with open defecation practice of 76.7%. Due to the deep-rooted subsidy culture by communities that have for a long time depended on humanitarian support, county majorly inhabited by nomads has never had the opportunity to benefit from community led total sanitation (CLTS) approach adopted by the ministry of health as the strategy to fight open defecation, however many villages have been triggered all over the county with none attaining ODF status (MOH, 2014).



Breaking the cycle of sickness and poverty and to save the lives of men, women and children who should not be forced to battle every day just to get a proper sanitary facility and clean drinking water is a priority for the communities in Wajir. No other intervention has a greater overall impact on economic development and public health in the county than creating cost-effective access to clean water and proper sanitation.

CLTS is an integrated approach that focuses on igniting change in sanitation behaviour rather than constructing toilets. It does this through facilitating a triggering process that evokes emotions of disgust and shame associated with the practice of open defecation. It concentrates on the whole community rather than on individual behaviours. It also creates a culture of fighting dependence on subsidies whereas open defecation and the cycle of faecal–oral contamination continued to spread disease. CLTS focuses on the behavioural change needed to ensure real and sustainable improvements – investing in community mobilization instead of hardware, and shifting the focus from toilet construction for individual households to the creation of open defecation-free villages. By raising awareness that as long as even a minority continues to defecate in the open everyone is at risk of disease. CLTS triggers the community's desire for collective change, propels people into action and encourages innovation, mutual support and appropriate local solutions, thus leading to greater ownership and sustainability.

### Issues that necessitated the innovations

The target community for the programme possessed several unique characteristics, which affected the programme either directly or indirectly. The main feature of the community which affected the progress of the programme is the semi-nomadic lifestyle where the community members moved from one place to another in the search for water and pasture for their animals, especially when stricken by drought. Household heads (mostly men), migrate with the livestock to far places leaving behind women, children and the elderly at the homesteads. This hampered progress since decisions that touch on household economy are traditionally made by men. Subsequently, family members who are left at home are not at liberty to make such decisions as putting up the most basic sanitation facilities due to the monetary resources required, however minimal.

The K-SHIP team was able to demonstrate the effects of open defecation through the 'F Diagram' and calculation of medical expenses and loss of time/productivity during triggering sessions. However, despite understanding the dangers of practising open defecation, the community viewed it as a normal practice which has been in existence since time immemorial. In contrast, proper disposal of human excreta was viewed as a foreign concept.

However with the strong collaboration between WASDA and the County department of health, the team adopted several innovative approaches within the actual CLTS approach to ensure high demand for safe human excreta disposal is created and positive behavior changes on hygiene and sanitation enhanced. This led to the achievement of the first ever 13 ODF villages in Wajir County.

## Innovative approaches used to trigger behaviour change

- ✓ **Customizing the timing of triggering** - CLTS activities are mainly intensified during the rainy seasons. The CLTS triggering session being the mother of the journey towards ODF status was mainly done at a time when the community members were not faced by challenges like water scarcity and lack of enough pasture for their animals. Previous experiences have shown that triggering sessions held during the dry seasons have faced challenges like low turnout of the community members as most of them have either moved to far flung areas in search of water and pasture. Sanitation and hygiene messages delivered at such times are therefore regarded as untimely and are not a priority. Moreover, during the dry spells, most of the household heads (men), who also make the economic decisions, migrate with the livestock to far places leaving behind women, children and the elderly at the homestead. This has necessitated the need to intensify most of the CLTS activities during the rainy seasons. To avoid low turnout during the triggering sessions, pre-triggering is done exactly one day before the actual triggering day, since most community members do not keep record of such official dates, either due to their busy schedules or high illiteracy levels.
- ✓ **Conducting post triggering follow ups at dawn and dusk** - CLTS post triggering follow-ups household visits are done in the early hours of morning or late in the evenings to take advantage of the presence of some of the men before they go for herding or after they return the livestock home. This is done to sensitize them as the key decision makers for the families. This approach has worked for the team by winning over the support of the men. Additionally, household heads who have moved very far with their livestock are mostly targeted for sensitization at the watering points. At times, triggering or follow up sessions are conducted over the weekend when the school children have taken up the role of taking the animals to the field and both the men and women are available.
- ✓ **Involvement of religious leaders during the triggering and post triggering follow ups** – Messages delivered by religious leaders in the mosques are the most trusted in Muslim dominated areas like Wajir. The target communities being predominantly Muslims, the team, throughout the CLTS process, involved religious leaders who drew strength from the fact that health, cleanliness and hygiene occupy a great part in Islam’s teachings. It is obligatory to clean oneself properly in preparation for daily prayers. In fact, caring for one’s hygiene is not only deemed a good habit in Islam but also rendered into rituals that constitute part of the faith itself. In Islam, cleanliness is regarded as half of faith. The Quran is more specific and says, “Truly, God loves those who turn unto Him in repentance and loves those who purify themselves.” (Quran 2:222) Targeting congregations in mosques with sanitation and hygiene messages through sermons especially during the Friday prayers known for large turnout of believers became the hallmark of the program. This was done deliberately to inform the communities that hygiene and sanitation/CLTS is not a foreign issue but one of the teachings of the Holy Quran and the practices of the Prophet Muhamad (PBUH). Imams reiterated the importance of the saying of the prophet on open defecation: *“Beware of the three acts that cause you to be cursed: relieving yourselves in shaded places (that people utilize), in a walkways or in watering places.”* (Abu Dawud 26).  
For people who have normalized open defecation and viewed proper disposal of human excreta as a foreign concept, the above few examples from the noble Qur’an and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) came a stark reminder that proper sanitation is a religious obligation and that one cannot receive the proximity of Allah spiritually and most importantly, faith cannot be completed in the absence of cleanliness and purity. This set the stage for increased acceptance and accelerated the promise of a more sustainable behaviour change.
- ✓ **Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILCs) for women** – In addition to the persistent droughts, a gamut of factors including high poverty levels, high illiteracy among women and girls, low access to economic empowerment opportunities and pre-existing gender inequalities and exclusion from decision making make women the most affected by the sanitation challenges with in the target community. Some women, therefore, have to walk long distances to relieve themselves in the bushes. This has oftentimes exposed them to sexual and gender based violence, especially during clan conflicts or mass migrations. They are however, the most receptive to sanitation and hygiene messages and are willing to change the status, but lack financial muscle to effect the said changes. In a bid to create financial independence for these women, WASDA

provides them with guidance on SILCs, commonly known as *Ayuta* in the Somali context. These are a type of community-based savings groups that strengthen the livelihoods of the participants. It allows women to meet their small, short-term financial needs for household cash flow smoothing, income-generating activities, social obligations and emergencies without having to borrow from a money lender, or rely on the men. This is targeted at enabling the women help their households climb up the sanitation ladder. WASDA is also exploring opportunities to link them to the county revolving fund.

- ✓ **Sanitation ambassadors in schools** – village sanitation committees and school children have formed a formidable team that patrols the village and shames households that practice open defecation. This has led to an increase in the number of parents yielding to pressure from the school children.
- ✓ **Giving responsibilities to the most resistant community members** – the team gave responsibilities to the community members who were not willing to end open defecation, i.e. members of the sanitation committees. This set them up to be ridiculed as the committee member who preached water and drunk wine. It eventually changed their stance and helped them wholeheartedly join the bid to end OD in the villages.

### Key lessons learnt, recommendations and conclusions

- Empowering women financially makes it easier to achieve ODF in situations where men migrate with the livestock.
- Involvement of religious leaders to shed light on religious perspectives on sanitation helps in overcoming resistance from the deeply religious Muslim communities.
- Involving religious institutions such as Islamic Schools (Madrasa) during school led total sanitation (SLTS) activities can also help young children in this schools play their part in educating the people about the importance of sanitation and links with Islamic teachings.
- Customizing the timing of CLTS triggering and follow ups to the context helps reach key household decision makers.
- Achieving ODF is slow in the rural arid and semi-arid areas, where people are predominantly pastoralists, with deeply rooted dependency on subsidies.



**Photograph 1. A woman digs her own pit latrine (left) and the complete latrine (right)**

Source: WASDA K-SHIP team



**Photograph 2. A deserted household in  
Riba – effects of Nomadism**

Source: WEDC – WASDA K-SHIP team

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### **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to extend thanks to Amref Health Africa, WSSCC and Wajir County Department of Health through Wajir East Sub County Public Health Officer for making this programme a success.

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