



Need Based Health Extension Workers Training on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: Evidence from Community Outreach Program

1. Introduction

Ensuring the optimal use of both water supply and sanitation facilities and practicing safe hygiene will result in the greatest impact on public health. A lack of household-level toilet facilities, inadequate treatment of human excreta, lack of access to safe water and poor hygienic practices contribute directly to the incidence of diarrhea. In 2010, diarrhea and related diseases such as cholera and typhus accounted for 10% of all childhood deaths on a global basis, which was nearly the same as malaria, measles and AIDS combined. Poor water, sanitation and hygiene practice contribute 50% of the global malnutrition burden. Diarrhea-induced loss of vitamins and nutrients can lead to malnutrition, leaving children in a weakened state and at risk of further infection and stunted development. Though progress has been made in combatting diarrheal diseases, it persists as a significant contributor to childhood mortality despite simple and widely available treatments and preventative technologies.

More than 60% of the diseases in Ethiopia are due to poor water, sanitation and hygiene (WaSH) interventions. Diarrhea is the leading cause of under five mortality in Ethiopia, causing 23% of all under five deaths (73,341 children per year). An estimated 64,540 children could be saved every year by improving WaSH in the country. Around 44% of under-5 children in Ethiopia are stunted which can be strongly linked to the childhood incidence of diarrhea and other diseases of intestinal tract. To solve such problems the government of Ethiopia has introduced Health Extension Program since 2004 and delivering sixteen health packages at the grass root level that focus on sustained preventive health actions and increasing health awareness where WaSH is the pillar. The Ethiopian Institute of Water Resources (EIWR) at Addis Ababa University is running Water and Health program that integrate education, research and community outreach programs. WaSH is one component of its outreach aimed to enhance the awareness of Health Extension Workers and community with regard to water and health related issues.

2. Training Need Assessment

The EIWR in collaboration with partner universities (Addis Ababa University, Arba Minch University, Bahir Dar University, Hawassa University and Mekelle University) carried out its third summer community outreach program on WaSH for undergraduate students from July 1-August 30, 2014. The objective of the summer outreach activity was to enhance the capacity of undergraduate students on identify down to earth community WASH challenges and experience to work in a team. This provides the opportunity for the students to synthesis and apply their academic coursework to solve real problems in rural villages that will enhance their skill in developing context sensitive solutions that best serve the need of the local communities.

A total of 96 (64 male and 32 female) undergraduate students from five EIWR partner universities were given the opportunity to participate in the program. As WaSH requires a multi-disciplinary team, the selected students had backgrounds in engineering, water science, social-sciences and public health disciplines. While in the field the students conducted a household cross-sectional surveys using semi-structured questionnaire and observational checklists so as to assess WaSH status within the community. Based on their survey results, students identified list of problems for each villages and prioritize for intervention. As an immediate solution

they had offered health information for the community on the critical moments of hand washing, the importance of safe cooking practices, the importance of separating animals and humans, the importance of having a safe water source like protected well and spring, vector control issues etc. They also distributed a two page hand washing poster which depicted the steps of hand washing and cleansing rituals. Most importantly, students identified and recommended a refreshment training on WaSH for Health Extension Workers as reliable solution to sustained continuous community awareness campaign that will enhance their proactive involvement in the selection, construction, maintenance and utilization of WaSH facilities. As a result, the EIWR organized three days training for Health Extension Workers on WASH aspects.

3. Training Material Preparation

Water and health staff of EIWR prepared the training manual. Experts from partner universities contributed for region specific content and reviewed the whole document. The content of training manual were guided by the findings of the summer undergraduate outreach program. The training material was focused on water supply, sanitation, hygiene promotion and community empowerment. Besides, region specific problems / existing barriers to implement WaSH activities were also incorporated in the training manual for each region training site (Tigray, Amhara, Oromia and Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Region) to make the training fruitful.

The summer undergraduate outreach program identified diarrheal disease as a major public health problem associated with poor WaSH access and utilization. Many pathways can contribute to the transmission of diarrheal diseases as depicted in Figure 1. An intervention targeted to tackle a single transmission pathway may not result a significant health improvement. Therefore, public health intervention on WaSH should be planned and implemented in an integrated manner. The training material was organised to address the challenges in implementing effective WaSH services particularly to break the diarrheal disease transmission route sustainably through proactive public involvement (see Figure 1).

4. Health Extension Workers Training Delivery

The EIWR organized three days training for health extension agents on WaSH in five

different places namely Arbaminch, Bahir Dar, Hawassa, Mekelle and Sheno where undergraduate students engaged in the community outreach program. The EIWR, the five partner universities and regional health offices selected 100 health extension agents (3 male and 97 female), 20 health extension agents for each training site. Highly qualified trainers which were selected from each partner university delivered the training for health extension workers. The training delivery modality was highly participatory. Trainees were also visited different WaSH facilities in the communities to evaluate their efficacy in preventing diseases. For example, trainees at Bahir Dar were visited improperly sited protected well (Figure 2) and given an explanation about site selection problems.

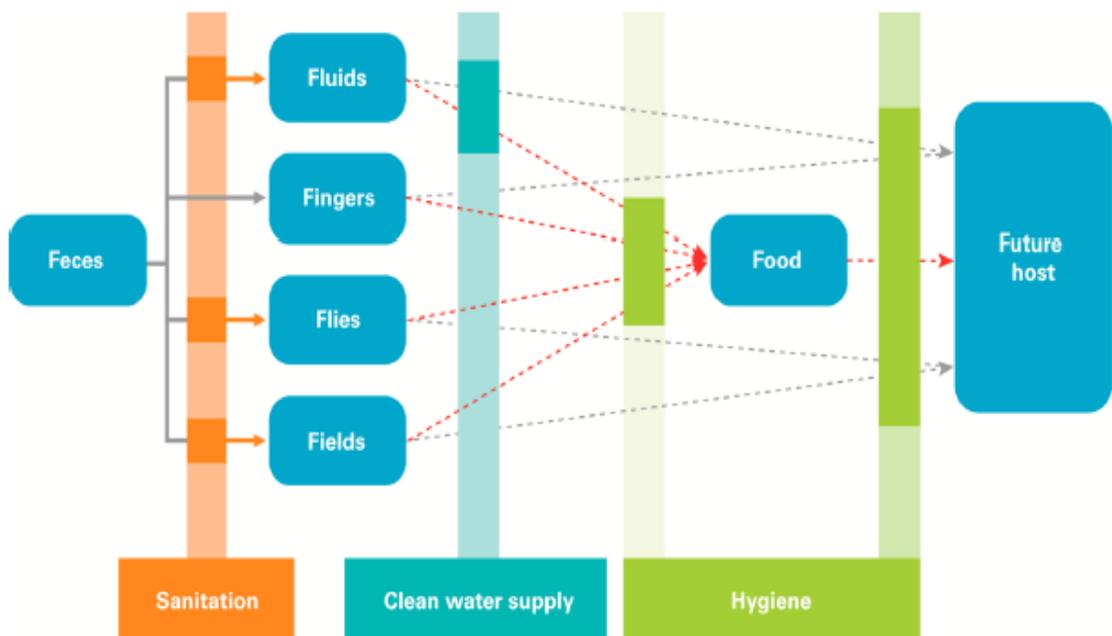


Figure 1. Pathways of diseases transmission and possible interventions

5. Trainee Feedback

Trainee gives their witness as the training material is well structured to address the unique problems facing each region making the training particularly relevant for the health extension workers in each woreda. Participants reported that the training was valuable because it helped to fill critical gaps in knowledge, emphasized the importance of understanding problems from the community's perspective, and it explained the critical relationship between water supply, sanitation and hygiene. They also said that the training helped them to better understand their responsibilities and how important it was to work with other stakeholders.

6. Conclusion

The aim of any WaSH programme is to promote good personal and environmental hygiene in order to protect health. An effective WASH programme relies on an exchange of information between the agency and the affected population in order to identify key problems and culturally appropriate solutions. The proactive involvement of all stakeholders including the communities is a prerequisite for sustainable WaSH capacity building and implementation. The training delivered to Health Extension Workers were need based and region specific that should be accepted as a model for planning and implementing WaSH trainings.



Figure 2. Trainee field visit to improperly sited protected well located at a village near to Bahir Dar

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