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

The role of the church in improving access to sanitation

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The local church is often found at the heart of a community, not only upholding belief, cultural values and social tradition, but also as a force for positive change and development. This paper illustrates how the church is well-placed to fulfil the vital roles necessary to deliver and sustain improved hygiene and sanitation. It draws on case studies that illustrate church-based responses to the need for improved sanitation and hygiene in programmes supported by Tearfund, a Christian relief & development agency. Five roles, key to the development and change needed to tackle the sanitation crisis, characterise the church's involvement: Messenger (Communicating messages about improved sanitation and hygiene); Demonstrator (Demonstrating an improved facility or practice); Implementer (Helping communities attain improved sanitation and hygiene through technical and financial support); Advocate (Speaking out to policymakers with, and on behalf of, communities); Guardian (Maintaining the gains achieved through improved hygiene and sanitation).

Introduction

For millions of individuals, lack of access to safe, sustainable sanitation means continued indignity, shame and fear of having to use unsafe and unhygienic facilities. Women risk daily harassment and assault, girl children find attendance at school difficult, especially in their teenage years, and millions of working and school days are lost to illnesses, stemming directly from hazardous sanitation practises.

Tearfund and its partner agencies support local churches¹ in developing countries across the world as they work with communities to tackle poverty issues at the grass-roots level, amongst them the sanitation crisis. The local church is often found at the heart of a community, not only upholding belief, cultural values and social tradition but also being a force for positive change and development. Thus, churches are in prime position to mobilise communities and work with them to improve access to sanitation and affect behaviour change for better hygiene.

The value of the church in this context is described via five potential roles the church can and is playing, key to the development needed to tackle the sanitation crisis:

Five roles of the local church in engaging in sanitation and hygiene

- Messenger – communicating messages about improved sanitation and hygiene;
- Demonstrator – offering individuals and communities the chance to experience a well kept toilet or hand-washing facility;
- Implementer – helping individuals and communities to attain improved sanitation and hygiene facilities, through technical and financial support;
- Advocate – speaking out to those in authority with and on behalf of communities to express their need and desire to have improved hygiene and sanitation;
- Guardian – helping communities and individuals maintain the gains achieved through improved hygiene and sanitation.

Case studies from Tearfund's partner organizations in Brazil, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, and Uganda illustrate the five roles, all of which contribute to transformation either at an individual, community or government level. Each role is of equal value and importance, meeting a gap in adoption of improved sanitation and hygiene practices, and some will be more appropriate than others, depending on the local context and capacity.

By their very nature (sharing messages of holistic well-being with regular attendees), churches can most easily fulfil the role of Messenger, and to varying degrees, Demonstrator and Implementer, depending on their knowledge and capacity. Some of Tearfund's partners have become effective Advocates, and governments at various levels have recognised the church's technical expertise and competence which has been used to influence policy. The church's long-term commitment in a community makes it ideal to act as a Guardian for sustaining project benefits.

Whilst a particular church, or church-based organisation, may focus on one or more of these roles, they are often interconnected. For example, being a Messenger for improvements in domestic hygiene and sanitation is often coupled with demonstrating this. Similarly, being an Advocate for policy change in sanitation may incorporate demonstrating evidence of successful programmatic intervention, whilst the church, as Implementer of sanitation programmes, usually requires connection with all five roles.

Sanitation marketing

Tearfund acknowledges the vital role of sanitation marketing (a market-oriented approach to promoting improved sanitation) in achieving increased uptake of household sanitation facilities. As an integral part of the beneficiary community, the church's members understand the aspirations and mindsets of end-users, and their needs. Tearfund fully embraces a sanitation marketing approach in which various user groups receive training in basic masonry, organizational management, financial management, and other skills to enable a community to meet its own needs. Indeed, this is already being taken up by various implementing church-based partners, such as the Anglican Church of Tanzania, and thus far, the response from local churches has been positive.

The role of teachers, community health workers, NGOs, local entrepreneurs, and religious leaders from within the community are all crucial in terms of empowering and motivating communities to make changes for themselves. Therefore, Tearfund supports partners who work with these stakeholders in education, awareness-raising campaigns and community mobilisation programmes which create demand, rather than build services.

The sanitation marketing approach is therefore not incompatible with any of the roles identified for the church, since each role is part of a combined, community-focused effort to both stimulate demand and maintain supply of improved sanitation facilities.

Messenger

A key strength of the local church is its ability to draw alongside the poor and marginalised, providing messages of hope and well-being. Particularly in rural areas, the church may be the only social institution in a community, and therefore presents a great opportunity to disseminate messages about improved hygiene and sanitation.

For the church, this is not merely an opportunity, but a responsibility that can be traced back thousands of years to its Hebrew² roots. The message of improved sanitation is a biblical message that church leaders can be challenged with through specific verses of Scripture on cleanliness and holiness. Church leaders often find this easy to connect with, recognising the authority of the Bible.

ACCEDES (Christian Alliance for Economic Cooperation and Social Development), Burkina Faso

Since Burkina Faso is around 50% Muslim and 30% Christian, Tearfund partner ACCEDES worked with both groups of religious leaders to ensure that its hygiene message reached as many people as possible. ACCEDES' WASH Programme (2007 - 2010) began with a five-step model to disseminate the messages to a wide and diverse audience. This included ACCEDES approaching Christian and Muslim leaders separately, helping them to identify linkages between their religious teachings and hygiene, discussing with them how hygiene messages could be incorporated in church services and prayer times, inviting religious leaders to be part of Hygiene and Sanitation Committees to oversee the long-term impact of the programme,

and working with the faith community to identify particularly poor and vulnerable families who ACCEDES staff can work more closely with towards adopting improved practices in sanitation and hygiene.

Demonstrator

Complementing the role of Messenger is the local church being a Demonstrator, showing its community the effective use of improved sanitation approaches and good hygiene practises. Relationship-building is key to the role of Demonstrator, through trusted, respected and accessible facilitators.

While attending attending meetings at the church's venue, community members have the opportunity to visit and use a good latrine, experience the dignity and relative comfort of it, and learn some of the necessary practises to clean and maintain it. Thus they can better grasp the value such a facility would have in their own home. Establishing a volunteer rota to clean and maintain the church latrine further ensures communities develop habits and responsibilities that are foundational for good hygiene practises. For smaller churches, this role may be particularly relevant if the church lacks the capacity for widespread implementation of hygiene or sanitation programmes.

Kigezi Diocese Water & Sanitation Programme (KDWSP), Uganda

In Kigezi District, south-west Uganda, KDWSP has enabled around 240,000 people to benefit from increased sanitation since 1986 by equipping and mobilising local church congregations to promote and demonstrate good hygiene and sanitation. Two key approaches have been the use of in-situ demonstration facilities and live-in health trainers. Both of these have capitalised on the trust communities place in the local church and the relationships beneficiaries have with leaders in the church (Carter & Rwamwanja, 2006).

Implementer

Tearfund has found that churches can develop particularly strong and successful skills in either implementing an integrated WASH programme, or focusing on delivering one WASH component. Local churches are well placed to identify the most vulnerable members in a community and direct support to them, or to act as a mediator for external agencies, channelling resources appropriately. Since the church often represents a broad cross-section of the community, it can also make a good assessment of the potential contribution of the community to any project. The local church can also be used to work as a delivery mechanism for a national church or church-based organisation.

Diocese of Ruaha (DoR) – Anglican Church of Tanzania

In the village of Kilolo in central Tanzania, the DoR has trained a women's group to produce small latrine slabs to a very high quality standard. Following training of the group, and resourcing them with the moulds and basic tools on a repayment basis, the women set up a business producing slabs. The slabs are purchased by community members at an affordable price, and installed in latrines of varied structures – there is no recommended standard structure, although appropriate dimensions of latrine pits and slab support are suggested by DoR. During the first 18 months around 65% of community households improved their sanitation facilities through purchase of a slab. The women's group continues to make sufficient business to keep production rolling and compliment their household income.

Advocate

Local churches are well suited to mobilising their congregation and the wider community to engage in advocacy. The reach of the church is significant, with the potential to connect the grass-roots to a much wider network, typically extending to national-level decision makers. Further impact can be sort with churches working in partnership with other faith-based organisations, community based organisations or NGOs. Church leaders and congregations have proven to be effective in lobbying on local issues.

Within the church, the capacity to identify and communicate issues prioritised by communities is huge. Many of Tearfund's church partners have capitalised on this by using the church network to compile reports both on what the church has been able to accomplish (such as documenting good practise), and the gaps in sanitation coverage yet to be filled. This information can be shared with local policy makers and institutions responsible for hygiene and sanitation delivery, in order to better inform their planning. Hence, the church is effective in monitoring and communicating WASH needs and intervention impacts at community level.

FALE (“Speak”), Brazil

Fale is a national advocacy network founded in 2001 which seeks to mobilise churches and Christians to speak out and act on issues of poverty and injustice both within Brazil and globally. Since 2006, Fale has been campaigning to increase the political priority given to this issue by national policy makers. In December 2006, Fale began campaigning for environmental sanitation in Brazil, where around 43 million people lack access to improved sanitation, calling for a law to create a National Policy for Environmental Sanitation. In January 2008 the Brazilian government approved a law establishing national guidelines for public policy for environmental sanitation.

Guardian

The strength of a good hygiene and sanitation programme is its sustainability. Sustainability depends on many issues, such as the choice of training approach or technology, and level of ownership of the community. However, the ability to consistently follow-up project work has also proved to be a prominent component of successful sanitation and hygiene programmes.

A key virtue for this role is that the church will continue to be a part of the beneficiary community for much longer than any external organisation or agency. For years after the training or project work ceases, the church can retain and build its knowledge and capacity for further intervention.

Kigezi Diocese Water & Sanitation Programme (KDWSP), Uganda

KDWSP recognises the importance of providing ongoing support to committees in their management and maintenance roles, and in so doing, helps to build self-reliance within the community. In 2006, KDWSP launched its “Follow-up Programme” in communities where it had previously supported water, sanitation and hygiene promotion interventions. Community self-monitoring, usually implemented through women’s church volunteer groups, form the focus of this programme. The women’s groups visit households and village health centres regularly, and use Knowledge, Action, & Practice survey techniques to monitor the community’s access to sanitation, and associated health benefits.

Challenges

Table 1 summarises key learning points from each of the roles discussed. Challenges to realising the full potential of the local church in improving access to hygiene and sanitation, include:

Misconception

Policy-makers often misconceive the potential of the church, due to traditional views about its role, and to a belief that, since its technical capacity is often limited, it has nothing concrete to offer in increasing access.

- Government ministries should foster collaborative relationships with national church leadership, and seek to engage the church in its development agenda, recognising the additional capacity the church can provide in the task of service delivery;
- Church and church-based organisations need to seek a greater understanding of government (and political processes), NGOs, and donors, to aid dialogue and help establish closer partnership.

Limited networking

The church often struggles to network successfully outside of its own fraternity.

- Churches must engage openly with wider civil society, identifying the synergy in relationships with organisations who have similar social objectives;
- NGOs and CBOs should view local churches as partners, mutually building capacity, and networking with the local church in advocacy;
- The church must overcome denominational and sectarian differences, which hinders collaboration. Understanding poor sanitation and hygiene as a root cause of poverty, presents a common ground.

Overdependence on volunteers

Volunteers are a major resource of the church, but there can be an overdependence on their time and energy.

- All volunteers must be assisted in improving their own hygiene practices and sanitation facilities, and to capitalise on the benefits brought by improved access.

Table 1. Key learning points		
Role		
Messenger	1	As an integral part of its community, the church understands the cultural and social standpoints. Therefore its messages are contextualised and easily understood
	2	The church is perceived as sharing messages for the good of its members and its community
Demonstrator	1	The church, at the heart of the community, is well placed to host and manage demonstration projects, e.g. latrine maintenance, hand-washing
	2	The local church is likely to promote an appropriate affordable technology, since it is itself an integral part of the (poor) community it is demonstrating to, and usually has limited funding
Implementer	1	Significant volunteerism within churches allows for increased replicability, cost-effectiveness, and overall ownership of programmes. It does not seek financial profit outside of the need for replicating the project and covering costs
	2	The church is well-placed to identify vulnerable members in the community, as well as members who are better resourced. It can therefore make good assessment of the contribution of the community to any project
Advocate	1	The local church can be a strong activist on grass roots advocacy issues and can make a significant difference in the lives of individuals and communities. However, capacity building of churches is required for them to effectively engage in local advocacy
	2	Misconceptions of the church by policy makers, and a lack of understanding of political processes by local churches, can hamper advocacy work
Guardian	1	The church is well placed to act as a guardian – a permanent, on-going promoter of good hygiene and sanitation practices

References

Carter, R and Rwamwanja, R (2006), *“Functional sustainability in community water and sanitation: A case study from South-West Uganda”*. Tearfund, UK.

Notes

1. Local church refers to the body of Christian believers, of any denomination, who meet at community level.
2. Deuteronomy 23:12-14 – Direction is given on what to do about defecating as part of the laws given to Israel as they lived in camps during their migration from Egypt.

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