

CLTS in the village: Singing about the unmentionable

Background

Tilorma, in Kenema District, was the first village in eastern Sierra Leone to commit to eliminating open defecation. In August 2008, the village held a celebration where the children could be heard singing “kaka don don o, Lef for kaka na bush” (no more excreta in the open and stop defecating in the bush) while dancing to drums and parading around the village.

Response

In February 2008, the people of Tilorma took part in a CLTS sensitisation training, during which facilitators from the Ministry of Health, UNICEF, NGOs and community organisations showed them how flies travel to and from excreta left exposed in the open and deposit fragments on their food. For the first time, the villagers recognised that they were actually eating each others’ faeces. They were shocked when they understood the link between open defecation and disease transmission. During the training, the community decided that building latrines was essential and insisted that everyone used them, something which has ultimately enabled Tilorma to be declared open defecation free.

Despite initial enthusiasm, villagers in Tilorma faced many constraints. “We found it very difficult in the beginning to accept that we ourselves should build our own toilets with our own local materials”. In the past, the international community supported sanitation programmes that provided materials and labour for digging of pits and building toilets. In contrast, Community-Led Total Sanitation mandates that neither subsidies nor building materials should be donated from outside the community.

A facilitator from GOAL, UNICEF’s partner NGO in Tilorma, noted that villagers “became very interested during the ‘triggering’ stage, but later, requested subsidies. In the end, after a lot of work, we managed to change their minds.”

The project’s key ally was the village’s most prominent figure, Chief Boima Swarray, who declared that open defecation must end. Chief Swarray set up a two-person team to patrol the village every morning. Villagers who did not keep their surroundings clean were cautioned, and those seen defecating in the open were taken to the Chief for consultation. “Eighty per cent were willing to adopt the project after awareness was created,” he said. “The by-laws are simply to ensure complete compliance.”

Impact

- Tilorma has been declared open defecation free.
- Thirty latrines built to serve 600 residents. More planned so that every household will have its own toilet.
- Toilets built from natural, affordable and locally available materials (palm fronds, sticks and gravel) by members of the community.
- Cassava farm established with proceeds used to improve latrines with cement and better construction.
- Mahmud Konneh, a farmer, is one of those who received CLTS training at the introductory workshop. Konneh lost his grandmother to cholera during a major outbreak in 2004. This, combined with the ‘triggering’ that occurred during the training, motivated him to build a toilet.

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Challenges

- Initial expectations by the community that materials and labour would be provided by the NGO instead of by themselves

Key Factors For Success

- Community understanding of link between poor hygiene practices and disease
- Desire of community to end open defecation
- Support of village chief and legislation introduced to require people to use latrines
- Good leadership from within the community

Looking Ahead

If Tilorma can keep up its progress in sanitation, the village will act as a CLTS showcase and inspiration for other communities in Kenema District and throughout Sierra Leone.

Further Information: UNICEF, 'Sierra Leone: Singing about the unmentionable', Sanitation and Hygiene Case Study #8, UNICEF, New York, 2008