

Project Malio: a detailed insight into Azafady UK's lessons from Year One

Project Malio is Fort Dauphin's largest sanitation and hygiene behaviour change initiative and the biggest project ever run by Azafady UK. It's taking an innovative and broad-ranging approach, tackling Fort Dauphin's hygiene and sanitation issues from five main angles: Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS)-style "triggering" and follow-up in communities, household latrine construction support, school hygiene education and latrine repairs, capacity building for implementing partners, and mass mobilisations and media campaigns. All this means that the Malio team are encountering unexpected events, reactions and barriers – and are learning a lot. Whilst some of the things coming up are likely associated with the particular context in Fort Dauphin, some may be applicable to urban CLTS initiatives elsewhere. Some are approach-specific and some are simply down to good project and people management. Many are neither new nor ground-breaking – and some sound startlingly obvious with the benefit of hindsight! – but all have proved key to Project Malio's success.

Broadly speaking, the Malio team's learning can be grouped into eight key themes:

1. Project preparation: taking time to recruit, train and plan with your team from the start
2. Scheduling and coordination: ensuring activities run as smoothly and effectively as possible
3. Monitoring and evaluation: identifying practical ways to measure what really matters
4. Quality control: training and trusting frontline staff working with limited supervision
5. Stakeholder engagement: realistic involvement of local government
6. Equity and inclusion: making sure the most vulnerable are participating
7. Project design: a miscellaneous selection of unforeseen challenges and potential solutions
8. Budget: what would we change if we designed it all again?

1. Project preparation: taking time to recruit, train and plan with your team from the start

Getting the right team has been vital to Project Malio's success so far. The Malio team of staff and implementing partners is big by Azafady UK's standards, spans two departments (construction and health) and contains a number of completely new roles. Given the limited human resource base in the small and isolated town of Fort Dauphin, recruiting suitably skilled team members took time. In several cases we had to hold multiple recruitment rounds and ended up opting for potential over experience. Whilst training up an inexperienced team will help the town's skills base in the long run, in the immediate-term it meant that several team members needed more support and supervision that hadn't been planned for. This put pressure on senior team members who were already working hard and learning lots themselves. Building team capacity takes time, budget and organisation to do properly which, with hindsight, we could have done with more of in Year One.

In particular,

- Perhaps the single most important factor in implementing CLTS projects is great facilitation. As such, it's really important to identify dynamic and inspiring frontline facilitators – staff Azafady UK call Community or School Liaison Officers (CLOs or SLOs) – and to set aside enough time and budget to train them well. Many of Project Malio's CLOs have previously worked with different sanitation approaches and we've found we've had to work extra hard to help some of these team members "unlearn" the more didactic techniques they're comfortable with and get used to supporting community members to realise things for themselves.

- CLOs also need to have the initiative and skill to adapt their way of working to different household situations and family members, and to be comfortable initiating conversations about potentially taboo subjects. In Project Malio, CLOs facilitate triggering sessions, focus group discussions with clusters of neighbouring households, and individual household visits. This means that, as well as having a strong factual knowledge of sanitation and hygiene, they need to be able to work with and gain the trust of community members in this range of settings. Given the skills shortage locally, Azafady UK has found it difficult to recruit facilitators with the confidence to conduct such a range of activities but has also found it important that CLOs are locally recruited to ensure they can relate to and are accepted by beneficiaries. As with the point above, this emphasises the need for really strong training and professional development opportunities within the project.

2. Scheduling and coordination: ensuring activities run as smoothly and effectively as possible

Many of Project Malio's activities are closely linked and require close coordination between sub-teams to run as intended. This has affected several areas of the project but the most challenging aspect has been coordinating the construction team as they support households with latrine construction whilst the CLOs run concurrent behaviour change activities. With construction progress highly dependent on the speed of construction by householders (who are responsible for completing most of the building work themselves), the construction team's schedule is particularly prone to change. In order to maximise coordination between the construction team and CLOs, the CLO Manager now has increased input into the construction team's scheduling; weekly team catch-up meetings and a white board to show who's where on which days each week have been implemented; the two sub-teams now have joint reporting requirements; and periodic progress reviews to identify and discuss any larger issues have been prioritised. The extent of these measures highlights the size of the challenge! Whilst these are working well, they require continued motivation and effort to be conducted routinely, particularly during the busiest project periods when they're needed most but when there can be a temptation to skip them. All in all, it really links back to the first lesson we learned about forward planning and regular communication...

In particular,

- The challenge of coordinating the construction and CLO teams means that behaviour change support does not always coincide with latrine construction, and therefore that the topics discussed are not always immediately relevant to the households participating. This also applies to the SLO's work supporting schools to develop latrine management and maintenance plans before the construction team repair their facilities. One of the single biggest challenges of Project Malio has been striking a balance between ensuring that the construction process is participatory – with planning led by households and schools rather than being imposed by Malio's construction team – and realistically scheduling project activities to enable coordination with other sub-teams and the achievement of annual outputs. Moving into Year Two, the construction team began to stagger their support to different sectors, working in multiple areas at once rather than implementing support activities consecutively like they did in Year One. It is hoped that this will ensure that the majority of the most technically challenging work (like building the concrete latrine pits) is completed early on, enabling households to get on with the remaining construction activities themselves and giving the CLOs enough time post-pit construction to conduct their support sessions.
- Project Malio is a big project and most of the time everyone in the team is working at capacity. This is fine until someone is away unexpectedly at short notice. Perhaps they are ill or at a funeral;

whatever the reason, unless their activities are reassigned something is likely to get missed. In the case of Project Malio, this has tended to be monitoring. Now that this problem is on the team's radar, strong communication and some clear protocols to prompt remaining team members prioritise upcoming tasks are helping to make sure key activities continue no matter what.

- Related to this, and to the need for timely analysis and dissemination of monitoring data (see lesson three below), the Malio team have found that it is vital to share their experiences with each other regularly. If the construction team find that a particular household isn't very motivated to build their latrine, for example, the CLOs need to know so that they can address this during their support sessions. Similarly, if the CLOs identify a reason for a household being unable to support construction, the construction team need to know so that they can provide additional manpower. This is another lesson that sounds obvious but unless people make a special effort to communicate across sub-teams, we've found that it often doesn't happen.
- Like many projects that have as broad a scope as Malio, some activities get more attention than others. They may be easier or more fun to implement, or perhaps they're just closer to the top of the Gantt chart. Whatever the reason, it's really important to make sure that individual activities aren't run at a scale that is detrimental to the rest of the activities. The Malio team, for example, planned a huge town-wide mass mobilisation for World Toilet Day towards the start of activities in Year One. The day was fantastic but, because the new team spent so much time coordinating it, several other activities were neglected in the run up to it and took several weeks to catch up.
- The entire Malio team have held a one-day "Where We Are Now" meeting approximately every six months throughout the project to date. Each senior team member presents the activities they or their sub-team have implemented as well as their key results and challenges, which are then discussed by everyone. The meetings not only enable the team to check their progress and brainstorm solutions to problems, they also provide a great opportunity for team members to practice identifying and presenting pertinent monitoring data and question their own and each other's approaches and monitoring in a supportive environment. Many of the lessons described in this document were identified through these meetings.

3. Monitoring and evaluation: identifying practical ways to measure what really matters

How can you measure behaviour change effectively without using all your resources to do it? Given the breadth of Project Malio, assessing the contribution of each activity to the project's overall goal of reducing open defecation is proving challenging. The temptation initially was to try to measure everything but in reality much of the data wasn't used because the team simply didn't have time to process it fast enough. Moving into Year Two, the team cut back and simplified Project Malio's monitoring to give them more time to do the main part of their jobs and to enable the data to be analysed and fed back into the project faster. Focus was also placed on building the capacity of middle managers to summarise their sub-teams' data, both to help the database manager and to make the middle managers more aware of what their teams are finding as early as possible. Whilst a lot of monitoring was taken out, some was also added to make sure that the data that is being collected can be triangulated. We're glad we started this way round with too much monitoring initially as it's taken a while for some important issues to emerge and to decide what's important and what's not. All this really highlights the need for flexibility to ensure things can be changed as they need to be. **We're still picking holes in our monitoring methodology and would love to be able to reduce it further so please let us know what you're doing to assess latrine use and behaviour change!**

In particular,

- No single measure (that we know of) can be used to assess behaviour change. It's complicated – and therefore expensive – to monitor and as such needs to be exceptionally well planned to make sure resources are used efficiently. As well as asking people about their sanitation and hygiene behaviours, the Malio team are counting latrines, checking them to make sure they're actually being used, and monitoring how many people are using Fort Dauphin's main open defecation sites. We've found that most people in the town know the answers they think you're looking for in a knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) survey so we feel that these extra observations are vital for painting a more accurate picture.
- It's linked to the human resource points above but it's important to reiterate it in this context: with skilled personnel at a premium in Fort Dauphin, training and capacity building is vital. In order to cope with some of the heavier monitoring periods during Year One, the Malio team recruited external interviewers to conduct surveys from time to time. The quality of data collected in this way was noticeably inferior to that collected by the full-time team, however, with unanswered questions, incorrectly filled out data sheets and inconsistent responses. Although all external interviewers received basic training, more thorough training is needed in the future to make sure that the data is consistent with that collected in-house.
- Building on this, it is important to make sure that monitoring forms are simple to understand, quick and easy to fill out, and that the language used is unambiguous to avoid "lost in translation" errors. Malio's team has found that excessive monitoring can detract from the main purpose of project activities, with staff focussed more on filling out the monitoring form than conducting the activity in question. An evaluation at the end of Year One, for example, found that CLOs were often structuring household support visits around the monitoring requirements for these rather than the other way around. We also found that any sections of monitoring forms asking staff to record their own reflections/comments/concerns/general feedback on activities were the least filled out. This may reflect a lack of critical thinking skills or habits amongst team members, or possibly that junior staff are worried that contributing negative ideas or areas for improvement will be seen as poor job performance on their part or criticism of more senior team members. Capacity and confidence building is still needed to address these issues but we've found that talking through reflections/comments/concerns/general feedback rather than asking for them to be written down is helping.
- To make sure critical data is as reliable as possible, different sub-teams collect similar information which can then be compared. For example, the construction team record the number of latrines they build whilst CLOs record the number of latrines they see during their household visits. As simple as it sounds, getting these numbers to match up has proven difficult at times! After a large-scale data verification "latrine audit" exercise, the Malio team identified the importance of clearly defining indicators (what exactly does a "functioning" latrine mean?), monitoring areas (is this household in Sector Two or Three?) and target households (is the Mr Damy I visited the same as the Mr Damy you visited?). Again, although they sound simple, getting these things consistent can be difficult when you're working in informal settlements and it has taken the Malio team time – and errors – to overcome them.

4. Quality control: training and trusting frontline staff working with limited supervision

With so many activities – and many of the potentially most influential ones – conducted at the household or school level, it is vital that the quality of these is as high as possible. Given the difficulty of supervising each

and every household or school visit, this requires a high degree of skill and trust in the frontline CLOs, SLOs and construction team members. As with so many of the lessons learned through Project Malio, this can be linked directly back to the need for thorough team training, continued support and regular opportunities for feedback and reflection. Occasional spot checks are also helpful but only if they're a genuine surprise.

In particular,

- Feedback from beneficiaries during Year One highlighted that the latrine construction support provided by Malio's construction team was variable. Whilst some construction team members were providing good guidance and support for households as they built their latrines, others were not. Some were simply helping to distribute materials and then trying to charge households extra for providing any technical guidance. This affected both the quality of the latrines being built and households' trust in and engagement with the project.
- Whilst providing Azafady UK's own solutions to community- and school-defined barriers to improved hygiene and sanitation may often be quicker and easier than facilitating a process through which people can identify their own solutions, externally imposed ideas are unlikely to fully address the problems faced. To successfully facilitate this process though, staff need a significant degree of skill. Project Malio's SLO's initial efforts to support the school latrine management and maintenance planning process, for example, resulted in a series of incomplete and unrealistic plans. When a template was introduced to guide the planning process and provide ideas for the type of areas to consider, however, every school's plan mirrored the template without being adapted to meet individual needs. This highlighted the SLO's need for additional support from more experienced and confident senior team members to bring often older and more established professionals from other sectors together to address schools' sanitation and hygiene issues.

5. Stakeholder engagement: realistic involvement of local government

Project Malio has sought to involve the local government and municipal authorities at all stages, holding consultations with them during the project design stage, obtaining their sign off before project implementation and involving them in key decision making processes throughout the project. Local leaders have been actively engaged in community triggering meetings, members from all levels of the authorities have participated in radio interviews and town-wide events, the local education and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) authorities have supported the design of school latrine management and maintenance plans, and the municipality has contributed to the design of Malio's latrines and the ongoing negotiations to establish sustainable funding and management mechanisms for the public latrine. However, the Malio team have had to push hard for this level of engagement to date and the challenge now is to assess what level of support can realistically be continued beyond the project's lifetime. Once this has been established, the Malio team will need to work with the authorities to tailor activities throughout the remainder of the project to make the most of this.

In particular,

- Project Malio's SLO is responsible both for leading the design and facilitation of educational games and activities with students, and for supporting teachers, parents and local authorities to agree and implement realistic school latrine management and maintenance plans. In the context of Fort Dauphin where the local authorities have limited capacity and often varying priorities, engaging them can be a daunting task for a young team member. This is amplified by the fact that ideally

many of the school processes would be led by local authorities with support from the Malio team but in reality it is often the other way around. As such the Malio team are finding that additional support needs to be provided by well-respected senior team members until trust and strong institutional relationships are built between stakeholders.

6. Equity and inclusion: making sure the most vulnerable are participating

Whilst Project Malio aims to support the reduction of open defecation across Fort Dauphin as a whole, the project has a particular emphasis on supporting the poorest and most vulnerable households who would otherwise struggle to improve their access to sanitation. Although these groups need the project the most, the Malio team has encountered some unexpected barriers to identifying and working with them effectively. Some households simply do not have enough space for a latrine whilst others are renting from landlords who won't let them build one. Although the financial contribution required from households wishing to build a latrine was deliberately set low, some still consider it restrictively high. And could we improve our support for households to adapt the standard Malio latrine design to accommodate those who are elderly, disabled or pregnant? These issues emerged throughout Year One and the team will be working to address them so watch this space for continued learning on this area...

In particular,

- **How can we effectively identify the most vulnerable?** Following Malio's triggering meetings in each of Fort Dauphin's urban sectors, participants are invited to sign up for latrine construction support. CLOs visit interested households to check that they have an appropriate site for a latrine and to go through a number of criteria, including the need for households to agree to collect the latrine materials and carry out the manual labour, pay an MGA 5,000 (~£1) contribution to latrine costs, and participate in focus group and household support sessions. During these site assessment visits, CLOs also assess whether or not they think the household could build a latrine without Azafady UK's help in order to prioritise support for the poorest. This assessment is extremely difficult, however, with almost every household telling CLOs that they don't have the money in the hope of securing a cheap latrine. As a result, there have undoubtedly been latrines allocated to those who perhaps strictly speaking didn't need Malio's support to build one. But is it realistic (or an effective use of resources) to meticulously identify the 800 households most in need of a Malio latrine? Or is it adequate to allocate them to those who broadly meet the criteria and in the process aim to tip the balance to make having a latrine the norm and open defecation socially unacceptable? **These are questions the Malio team are still endeavouring to answer so we'd love to hear your thoughts!**
- **How can we support those without enough land for a latrine?** This is one of Project Malio's biggest challenges. Fort Dauphin is extremely overcrowded and many households simply do not have space for a latrine. Where CLOs deem a household ineligible for support for this reason, they try to work with neighbouring households to see if any are willing to share their latrine in return for a share of the labour and/or financial contributions. In several instances this has worked well, particularly where a neighbour is elderly or disabled and so would struggle to contribute to the construction of their latrine which a neighbour can help with. In order for such partnerships to work long-term though, it is important that cleaning, maintenance and emptying responsibilities are agreed from the start. (Even within households this can cause disputes which can lead to latrines being unused if they are not resolved). Malio is also piloting support for the sustainable management of a public latrine

close to one of the most overcrowded areas of Fort Dauphin as an alternative to household facilities, although we recognise that this isn't an ideal solution for most people.

- **How can we support those renting their land?** Some households renting their land (tenants) have had particular challenges improving their access to sanitation facilities. In some cases where the landowners (landlords) live on the same plot of land as their tenants, they have built a latrine for themselves but won't allow their tenants to share it, often citing that they are worried that their tenants won't keep it clean if they use it. In other cases, landlords won't allow their tenants to build a latrine on their land. This highlights the need for further engagement of both landlords and tenants to ensure that latrines are offered to the most suitable households, perhaps with the requirement that if a landlord receives a latrine they must also build one for their tenants. Additional household visits could also help to make sure that tenants receive the hygiene and sanitation behaviour change support usually offered to the primary latrine beneficiaries, which may in their case be the landlord.
- **How can we ensure that the most vulnerable have access to the project?** Whilst the poorest, marginalised and disabled are identified with local leaders in advance of triggering meetings and are specially invited to attend, the Malio team have encountered some households which have been unable to go on to build a latrine because they cannot raise the financial contribution required in the month-long payment window they are given. The MGA 5,000 contribution was designed to be low enough to be affordable for (almost) everyone yet high enough to make (most) households make a conscious decision to pay it. To eliminate cost as a barrier to improved sanitation for everyone, the Malio team is investigating ways to support those who cannot pay. Given the difficulty in distinguishing between households which genuinely cannot raise 5,000Ar and those who are unwilling to reprioritise household finances as others are doing, however, this is an ongoing challenge. The Malio team has also questioned whether reducing the household contribution below 5,000Ar is sensible from a sustainability perspective: if households cannot raise 5,000Ar for the latrine's construction, how will they be able to meet future maintenance costs?
- **How can we better support the elderly and disabled?** The latrines constructed through Project Malio are simple ventilated improved pit latrines built to a standard design. The design was developed by local construction workers in conjunction with local authorities and can be built with locally available skills, tools and materials. However, the latrines were not designed with the elderly, disabled or pregnant women in mind. With beneficiary households constructing the majority of their latrines themselves and external support provided only to give technical guidance, Project Malio encourages households to adapt their latrines to meet their own needs. Many households have altered the superstructure to better meet their needs and some have even enlarged the pit. We've seen innovative pulley systems for lifting off latrine lids, and some great handwashing stations. However, the elderly, disabled or pregnant women are unlikely to be the ones making these adaptations so perhaps we should be involving them more at the design stage.

7. Project design: a miscellaneous selection of unforeseen challenges and potential solutions

A number of unforeseen issues were identified during Year One which may require fundamental changes to Project Malio's activities or approach. Unfortunately these can't be summarised neatly like the other challenges identified so we'll just list them. The team found that: households sharing a latrine need strong management and maintenance agreements to minimise the risk of a dispute resulting in closure/disuse of their latrine; competitions rather than time-intensive workshops can be a more realistic way of engaging busy secondary school students; parents need to agree any school latrine maintenance plans that rely on

student involvement; and partner associations must show commitment to both professional development and improving sanitation and hygiene in order to work effectively with Project Malio. These were all identified through – and highlight the need for – regular feedback, monitoring reviews and team reflection to make sure the project is as inclusive, efficient and effective as possible.

In particular,

- In most cases, the household latrines built through Project Malio are shared by a several households – often extended family members – who live on the same plot of land. The Malio team found that it's really important to support these groups to agree cleaning and maintenance plans before building their latrines and, when divisions or disagreements arise, to offer more than one latrine to the compound in question.
- In addition to supporting the improvement of school latrines and hand washing facilities, Project Malio's SLO is running fun and educational hygiene and sanitation activities in primary, middle and secondary schools throughout Fort Dauphin. In middle and primary schools, the team found that workshops during lesson time are both feasible and effective. Each class receives a session approximately every three months, with exercises, quizzes, posters and colouring pages distributed to help students stay engaged between sessions. In high schools where timetabling is tight, however, competitions which students can work on outside of school time proved more feasible than sessions held during lesson time.
- With limited resources available for cleaning school latrines, local government and teachers have stressed the importance of student engagement in this task. During Year One, however, the team encountered resistance from some parents who were opposed to this, suggesting that a school triggering for parents may be needed to secure their support in this area.
- Local implementing partners have been engaged to run Project Malio day-to-day, with a number of small community groups and associations assigned certain activities. The aim of their engagement is to increase local involvement in each of Fort Dauphin's sectors whilst building a pool of professional partners for future initiatives. As such, each local partner is invited to participate in a capacity building programme of training and in-house support to learn and implement new skills. Topics include financial management, professional operating principles and proposal and report writing. As many of these topics do not clearly link with sanitation and hygiene, a number of associations with no link to sanitation and hygiene expressed interest in participating during Year One but then proved unmotivated to contribute to the project's sanitation and hygiene-themed aims. Moving forward, it's really important that partner associations are selected both on their potential to benefit from the project and on the contribution they can make to achieving Malio's aims.

8. Budget: what would we change if we designed it again?

Given the innovative nature of Project Malio and the many lessons learned along the way (see above!), several activities ended up costing a different amount to what was predicted despite our best budgeting efforts. We really underestimated the level of construction support needed in town, for example: estimates were based on Azafady UK's experiences in neighbouring rural areas where people had no problems at all building their own latrines but Malio's construction team found that most households in town had very limited construction experience. We also underestimated the capacity and importance of our CLOs, who were very stretched during Year One. It was therefore really important that Project Malio had donors who



were flexible and willing to accept the changes the team proposed moving into Year Two in order to be able to adapt and build on our experiences.

We hope that this learning will be useful for others and would love to hear any feedback you have. We'd also like to hear about your experiences if you're running a comparable project. If you would like more information on Azafady UK's lessons from Project Malio, please get in touch with us at info@azafady.org.