

## CLTS FIRE IGNITED IN DRC

*By Philip Vincent Otieno*

CLTS fire was last week ignited in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) when Tearfund UK organized the first ever CLTS training in the country. The training was conducted by Philip Otieno and supported with Njoroge Kamau both of Plan Kenya. The training workshop, attended by 18 participants took place in Kindu in Maniema Province, during which time 6 villages were triggered.

The participants most of whom heard about CLTS for the first time during this training, were shocked to learn about the triggering tools employed by the approach. They could not believe that someone could enter a community and facilitate a session using the crude word of shit. They became speechless when they further learned that the triggering process also entails visiting the defecation areas, and carrying shit in the community. “That cannot happen in this community, and furthermore no one will accept to take you where they shit!” They said. “Some community members will throw us out if we try to do that!” Others protested. However the main facilitator patiently addressed all their concerns, and explained the use of the triggering tools and how making the exercise participatory helps to make the process fun and exciting for everyone. But it was clear that not all were convinced. Some could be heard murmuring, “there is no way I am going to carry shit in the community!”

On the day of the trigger, everyone was set for exercise albeit with reservations. To the pleasant surprise of all, everything worked out quite smoothly. The anticipated hostility from the communities never happened. Instead they encountered cooperative communities who were receptive to the triggering tools employed. The villagers freely took the outsiders to the defecation sites. They moved from home to home

assessing the sanitation situation. The villagers mocked each other when they came to a home that did not have proper sanitation facilities. “Don’t laugh at me. Wait till we reach your home. I am sure your situation is worse than mine” and every one would laugh at the comment. Most of the homes did not have latrines. The few that had latrines, had shit outside the aperture. In another home where several mountains of fresh shit were found, there was a huge laughter when somebody remarked, “in this home people shit a lot. Look at all this shit, there is shit everywhere”. What was even more amazing is that the facilitators who had declared that there is no way they were going to carry shit, were indeed the first ones to gather courage and carry shit confidently in the community. This act of carrying shit created a sense of shame and disgust amongst the villagers. Shame that visitors had been allowed to see the shit in the village, and disgust at looking at their own shit. Some held their noses to protect themselves from the bad smell, while others preferred to look far away from the direction of the shit.



Defecation mapping in progress

When the community reassembled after the transect walk, a somber mood engulfed the meeting. Shame and embarrassment was clearly written on their faces. They could hardly find their voices to speak. It was a humbling experience to be part of the meeting. Some decided to turn their back against the facilitator; others looked down, while others just held their cheeks in silence.

After applying the other triggering tools, the facilitators announced to the meeting that they were about to leave, eliciting immediate protest from the villagers. “You cannot just leave like that before we come up with a solution”, they protested. One elderly woman who was on the verge of tears said that, “I have sinned. I now realize my mistakes and ask for forgiveness. Please don’t leave us before you guide us on what to do”. This sense of remorse resulted in the villagers coming up with action plans to stop open defecation, and formed the CLTS committees to oversee the implementation process. In one particular village there was a sense of urgency to stop open defecation and construct latrines, when one of the village elders declared that, “We have the tools, the materials, and the manpower required to construct latrines. We need nothing from outsiders. This is work that can be completed within one week!”



Ignition moment: Disgust written large on the faces of community members

The triggering process and the outcomes energized the ‘doubting Thomases’ amongst the facilitators undergoing training. They were all united in saying that, “CLTS is a powerful approach, which will help us to improve the sanitation situation in DRC.” A few days after the trigger, the facilitators once again visited the villages to do follow up. A number of villagers had already started to dig the pits; some were already even constructing the superstructure. It was amazing to find men who were absent during the trigger, busy digging the latrine pits due to the influence of their wives who had taken part in the trigger. Following the field visit, one of Tearfund WASH officers said that, “In my life I had never imagined that a community can accept to construct latrines without any subsidies but today I have seen it with my own eyes.”

The fire of CLTS that started in Bangladesh has finally found its way in DRC; it has the potential revolutionizing the sanitation practice in the country.