



# Taking Action on Inactive Community-Led Total Sanitation Volunteers

## Lessons Learned on Reviving Community-Level Sanitation Leaders

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Chitipa District Council can be used as a case study to assess the effectiveness of Natural Leaders (NL) and analyze how to best utilize them for CLTS success. This study presents findings on how NLs currently function in Chitipa, and potential changes which can be made with how NLs are supported in order for them to work at scale in Malawi. A “Sanitation Leaders Networking Meeting” approach was piloted to address some of the challenges identified with NLs, which led to several recommendations for how Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs), the field staff for health, can more effectively support and utilize NLs for CLTS.

## Findings & Recommendations

### 1. Keep Natural Leaders active with continuous follow-ups from HSAs

In one of the villages studied, 46% of the registered Natural Leaders were inactive. Observations from villages in multiple Health Centres in Chitipa also showed similar trends. The term “inactive” was characterized by behaviours which included: refusal to perform CLTS related tasks, absence at village sanitation meetings, inability to provide accurate information on their village sanitation status, and lack of clarity on their role and the expectations attached with it. Additionally, the district does not do a good job of following-up with the NLs to see what support they need in order to stay active. HSAs could easily play this role since they are based in the same villages as NLs; however, they are currently not held accountable for following-up with NLS by their supervisors. Furthermore, they were not trained on how to work effectively with NLs and therefore don't know how to support them, which is preventing effective leadership by NLs.

**Recommendation:** The continuous involvement of NLs in CLTS activities can be supported by HSAs conducting follow-ups with them on a regular basis. This can involve monitoring the NLs to see if they are playing their role in the communities, working hand in hand with them to conduct village follow-ups, or providing a forum for them to discuss the challenges they face as NLs and potential solutions to these problems. The “Sanitation Leaders Networking Meeting” intervention, outlined below, is a promising approach that can be used by HSAs to keep NLs and other sanitation volunteers active and constantly supported.

### 2. Utilize other community volunteers to promote CLTS and sanitation overall

Natural Leaders are only one set of leaders who could be involved in sanitation promotion. In addition to NLs, various leaders in communities can also play a role in sanitation promotion. The whole range of community volunteers available were identified through this study as “Sanitation Leaders.” These are any community volunteers who demonstrate active participation in sanitation promotion, including the Village headman (VH), Village Health Committee (VHC) members, secretaries, and noblemen. In various communities, it was evident that having the involvement of the village headman and his noblemen contributed to CLTS success, since their authority gave legitimacy to CLTS and to the NLs in their villages.

**Recommendation:** Utilizing community volunteers in addition to NLs can decrease burden off NLs to always support CLTS. The volunteers listed above can also help to ensure CLTS and overall sanitation activities are still being promoted regardless of whether the chosen NLs are active or not. The “Sanitation Leaders Networking Meeting” can be a forum to bring these various community volunteers together to discuss how they as a team can improve on their work in sanitation promotion.

## Sanitation Leaders Networking Meetings: A Promising Approach

Sanitation Leaders Networking Meetings were conducted to address some of the issues observed with NLs. The meetings served as a follow-up method for HSAs to keep track of NLs and other Sanitation Leaders, and provide support as needed. This approach was adapted from a networking experiment previously conducted by Philip Vincent Otieno (Otieno, P., “Natural Leaders Networking”, [www.communityledtotalsanitation.org](http://www.communityledtotalsanitation.org)). These meetings were held in four separate group villages. Meeting participants included NLs, VHC, noblemen, and other identified Sanitation Leaders, with the HSA as the main meeting facilitator.

The key meeting objective was to build a Sanitation Leaders network which would meet monthly to discuss challenges and solutions to sanitation promotion. In addition to this objective, specific objectives were as follows:

- Appreciate and recognize the work of Sanitation Leaders in order to motivate them to improve performance
- Provide space for community leaders to learn from one another and replicate good practices
- Facilitate the creation of a network of Sanitation Leaders who can hold one another accountable
- Create the atmosphere of team work among group village leaders instead of a competition
- Strengthen the relationship between key sanitation stakeholders by providing a communication opportunity

Results from these initial meetings were promising. HSAs recognized which NLs were inactive and which other Sanitation Leaders have taken their place. Both NLs and Sanitation Leaders clarified their role with the HSA in front of key stakeholders like the Village Headman, which created a definite role for them to be held accountable to. Village progress were revisited which inspired continuous work towards ODF. CLTS practices were reviewed, and participants learned a participatory tool for triggering for handwashing called the “Shit and Shake”. Neighbouring villages encouraged each other to stop defecating in the open and formed triggering committees to re-trigger neighbouring, non-ODF villages. The next meeting date and time was agreed on, and a commissioner was elected to call for future meetings. It appeared that these meetings revived CLTS and encouraged communities and HSAs to take it seriously.

### Best Practices for Reviving Inactive NLs & Sanitation Leaders Networking

Lessons learned from the “Sanitation Leaders Networking Meetings” are as follows.

- **Include all Sanitation Leaders.** The networking meeting should include all active volunteers who play a role in sanitation. They can take the place of inactive NLs and ensure that sanitation promotion continues.
- **Review CLTS practices with HSAs and Sanitation Leaders.** Review CLTS practices and role definitions for CLTS with all members so expectations are clear and Sanitation Leaders can be held accountable
- **Revisit village progress.** Sanitation Leaders often become more motivated when they present the progress of their village to authority figures and they can be praised for their hard work. Constructive criticism should be provided by participants to encourage those who have not progressed as quickly.
- **Include skill building exercises.** Demonstrations like the “Shit and Shake” which trigger for handwashing should be conducted with participants, so they have participatory tools to use for encouraging their communities to become ODF.
- **Facilitate commitment for the next meeting to ensure continuity of follow-ups.** It was observed that villages with fewer follow-ups have slower progression of CLTS and higher percentage of NL inactivity, as compared to those with frequent follow-ups. Meetings like this can ensure both villages and NLs are monitored regularly by the community, with facilitation support from the HSA. Ownership by the communities on the time, the venue, and other details for future meetings is important for success and sustainability.

## Conclusion

NLs along with other Sanitation Leaders have the capacity to support districts with their CLTS implementation provided the appropriate support from HSAs is given. Involving multiple leaders within communities for sanitation promotion, and providing constant follow-ups to them through approaches such as the “Sanitation Leaders Networking Meetings” can contribute to increasing the effectiveness of CLTS in Malawi.

*For further information on Chitipa NLs or the “Shit and Shake”, please contact EWB Junior Fellow Karina Redick at [karinareddick@ewb.ca](mailto:karinareddick@ewb.ca) or the EWB Water and Sanitation Team at [malawiwaterandsanitation@ewb.ca](mailto:malawiwaterandsanitation@ewb.ca)*