Mathare 10, Nairobi, Kenya

Piloting Urban Community-Led Total Sanitation approaches in an underserved informal settlement in Kenya

Mainstreamed by thirteen African Governments, Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) is widely recognized as a high impact, successful tool to promote improved hygiene and sanitation practices within rural communities. This pilot intervention aimed to apply CLTS in an urban settlement known as Mathare 10 in Nairobi, Kenya. The success of Urban Community-Led Total Sanitation (UCLTS) in Kenya clearly demonstrates the viability of this approach particularly within informal, peri-urban and marginalized urban settlements in developing countries.

Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) is a participatory approach that ‘triggers’ communities to take collective action by enabling them to analyze their sanitation practices and identify the subsequent impact on health and dignity. Previously CLTS has been successfully applied in rural areas, resulting in villages and sub-locations being declared ‘open defecation free’. This approach is now being applied in an informal settlement in the capital of Nairobi, its first application in an urban setting. While results from the pilot are slower than anticipated due to complexities in governance and community dynamics, it is meeting with successes similar to those seen in rural areas. The approach requires minimal funding, beyond the facilitation of the CLTS sessions, as the main result of this methodology is that citizens are galvanized to drive the process themselves of ending open defecation, demanding sanitary facilities from their landlords, constructing latrines and undertaking regular cleanups within their community. Community-driven behavioral change further results in an improved environment in which to live and improved health and hygiene among inhabitants.

The importance of the issue

The rapid growth of informal settlements often results in a corresponding backlog in service delivery. This is especially the case if an informal settlement falls outside the local government’s mandate to provide basic services, such as when settlements are either not built on municipal land nor follow a predefined development strategy. Alternative methodologies have, therefore, been developed within these communities to address the need for basic services.

Community mobilisation is the cornerstone of Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), a highly successful process predominantly applied in rural areas, but now also being tested in urban environments and proving to be successful. Harnessing local leadership and encouraging behavioural change at the community level allows for tangible improvements in service delivery in the absence of government intervention. Providing communities with the knowledge and skills to better their own quality of life is having a significant impact, does not necessitate large financial investments, and results in increased ownership and lasting behavioural change.

Part financed by the European Commission and running from December 2009 to November 2012, ACCESSanitation is working directly with cities in India and the Philippines to tackle inadequate urban sanitation. In addition, the project is also promoting sustainable sanitation on a larger scale through the transfer of good practice elsewhere in the target countries as well as from and to cities in Sub-Saharan Africa. ACCESSanitation is coordinated by the ICLEI European Secretariat located in Freiburg, Germany.

For more information visit: www.accesssanitation.org
Local context

Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, is home to over 4 million people of whom 60% live in informal settlements. In these informal settlements there is limited access to formal sanitation facilities and the facilities that do exist are typically in a state of disrepair and not connected to the municipal sewerage system. This has given rise to residents resorting to open defecation, to ‘flying toilets’ with people defecating in plastic bags which are then disposed of in an ad hoc manner, and also the use of plastic tubs (kasuku/bucket system). As many of these informal settlements are considered illegal, there has been limited government effort to raise the standard of living through the provision of services. Although the spread of democratic processes and campaigns by civil society and human rights organizations is now resulting in greater government recognition of these settlements, sanitation remains a challenge and continues to receive little attention. Most residents do not own the houses in which they reside and to date there is little evident government protection from landlords who do not supply safe and secure sanitation amenities. Density levels are high as landlords erect many buildings on their land so as to maximize profits, leaving little room to construct sanitation facilities. In addition solid waste management services are not provided within these settlements, resulting in high levels of unmanaged and widespread garbage, which contributes to poor health within the community. One such informal settlement where sanitation is a particular issue is Mathare 10, which comprises the four villages of Nyangau, Kwamburu, Mashimoni and Gumba.

Social mobilisation in an informal urban settlement in Nairobi: community driven change

Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) is a behavioural change approach that has been successfully implemented in 34 African countries including Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and Malawi. In the past CLTS has predominantly been applied in rural areas where strong community cohesion could be harnessed. Furthermore, it has now been mainstreamed by 13 African Governments, including Kenya, into their national policies and strategies. The CLTS approach is no longer in a pilot phase as officials can now quantify their districts that are ‘open defecation free’, not just the villages and isolated communities.

The methodology is now being adopted and applied in urban areas, such as the pilot initiative in Mathare 10, Nairobi, Kenya. Plan International (an international non-governmental organisation), in conjunction with Community Cleaning Services (CCS – a local social micro-franchise), is implementing a pilot project called ‘Urban Community-Led Total Sanitation (UCLTS)’. CCS focuses on enabling young entrepreneurs to initiate and grow their own businesses providing sanitation services, predominantly toilet cleaning and light maintenance.

How does it work? CLTS is based on facilitating communities to undertake an assessment of their sanitation situation, to draw their own conclusions, and to take remedial actions. They are not taught, influenced or forced into taking any decisions. CLTS, instead of being a supply-led subsidy driven campaign, focuses on ‘triggering’ behaviour change among the collective rather than the individual. This drives demand creation for total sanitation in the community. CLTS seeks to identify the ‘triggers’ that result in local residents changing their open defecation behaviour. A facilitator ensures dialogue among community members until an ‘ignition’ point is reached where the community collectively decides on actions to eliminate open defecation. Triggering remedial action is achieved by shaming the communities and generating a sense of disgust from activities such as:

• Mapping on the ground - to show where people live and where they defecate;
• Transect walks (walk of shame) to visit and stand in those places; and
• Calculations of quantities of excreta and identifying oral-faecal contamination pathways.
Once a community has decided to end open defecation they choose from different technological options and construct their own latrines with their own resources. Often those that are more affluent help those who are too weak or poor to help themselves. There is no standardisation or top-down design as people are encouraged to decide for themselves what they would like to do to improve their sanitation situation.

The Mathare 10 project identifies natural leaders within the community together with landlords, civic leaders, provincial administration and government institutions such as the Ministry of Lands, the Ministry of Local Government, City Council of Nairobi and the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation. Additional stakeholders include several human rights advocacy groups and representatives from the University of Nairobi’s Environmental Health Department, who wished to study and document the process.

The Urban CLTS in Mathare 10 put in place a highly effective integrated media campaign in partnership with Kenya Broadcasting Cooperation (KBC). Through radio and television the campaign reached over 7 million Kenyans country-wide, a far wider audience than the initial target area of Mathare 10. By way of example, the popular local KBC comedy show Vitimbi, which reaches in excess of 4 million viewers, has helped campaigners to stimulate open discussion with humour and to challenge cultural norms, beliefs and practices about sanitation and hygiene.
Results

In an urban context, the issue of sanitation is often more complex than in rural areas, as communal solidarity and the spirit of joint action may not be as strong. Nevertheless, the Urban Community-Led Total Sanitation (UCLTS) initiative in Mathare 10 transformed attitudes and promoted communal solidarity, particularly amongst the youth. Tenants and landlords together identified sustainable initiatives to overcome the challenge of poor sanitation. In just one year the following where identified as key indicators of success:

• An increase in the number of landlords constructing latrines for their tenants;
• A marked decrease in open defecation;
• Observed use of the bucket system at night and disposal of the contents into the new, cleaner toilets rather than using ‘flying toilets’ (defecation into a bag that then is indiscriminately thrown from the residence);
• Excellent media coverage and interest from the municipality created demand for similar activities in other informal settlements within Nairobi;
• Residents pushed for sites to be cleared so new toilets could be constructed;
• Sanitation and the dangers of “shit” became integrated in community conversations (removing the stigma);
• Landlords and churches agreed to provide space to be used for communal latrine construction;
• Tenants cleaned up some open defecation sites and garbage disposal points and rehabilitated the areas by planting trees;
• Families started using the ‘landlords’ toilets, despite the US$ 2 cents fee;
• The youth, who played a leadership role in their communities, by cleaning drains and removing garbage, demonstrated their collective commitment to embrace change; and
• Local administration and public health officers from the City Council of Nairobi have begun to enforce environmental sanitation laws, wanting to leave a legacy of good sanitation in Mathare 10.
Lessons learned

As CLTS has predominately been applied within the rural context, there were a number of key factors to be considered in adapting the approach for low income, urban environments:

• Urban residents reside in a cash driven economy, often travelling outside the jurisdiction of their community for employment. This made it difficult for the project implementers to identify a suitable time of day during which the community members would be present. The project overcame this by undertaking the majority of the community participation work during public holidays, a time when there was a guarantee that a large proportion of the community would be present. However, despite such measures the large population of the community meant that not everyone could be reached.

• Initial research into the reasons for the practice of open defecation noted that safety was a key issue. Women and girls living in Nairobi’s informal settlements were often afraid to leave their houses to use communal toilets as they faced a threat of sexual violence. This was addressed through introduction of flood lights and the night time use of potties (the bucket system).

• Enthusiasm within the community to change the current sanitation situation was high. However, there was a genuine lack of space to construct new latrines due to the dense distribution of households, necessitating frequent emptying of latrines.

• Tenants and individuals without secure land tenure were often unwilling to invest in latrines.

• The involvement of government officials and influential local stakeholders in follow up visits to the households, coupled with their presence and appreciation within the activation sessions and subsequent activities, encouraged the community to enhance their sanitation practices.

• Involving women in the campaign and dedicated groups responsible for maintaining cleanliness in given territories or blocks, contributes to the scaling up of sanitation campaigns.

The advantages of applying CLTS in an urban context include the following:

• The larger cash economy of urban settlements means that residents can generally self-finance the construction of sustainable latrines.

• There are more media options for dissemination and communication, (radio, television, newspapers, posters, community networks and megaphone-vans), ensuring a higher proportion of the population can be reached.
Replication

The Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation (MOPHS) adopted CLTS as a high impact sanitation and hygiene promotion tool suited for nationwide application. To spearhead and coordinate the implementation of CLTS within Kenya, the MOPHS formed a CLTS unit with a designated focal person residing at the Ministry headquarters. While previously aimed at rural areas, the positive results of the pilot in Mathare 10 may result in CLTS being replicated in other urban areas.

Budget and finances

The initial training in Mathare 10 was undertaken upon invitation by Community Cleaning Services (CCS) in May-June 2010. Following the training CCS was invited to partner with Plan International Kenya on an eight country, Pan Africa CLTS project funded by the Government of the Netherlands. The three year initiative will contribute 50% of the salary for a CLTS coordinator in Mathare 10. Furthermore, the project’s zero subsidies stance allows the state to ensure laws are enforced and tenancy standards are complied with and to protect tenants from exploitative landlords who collect rent without providing adequate services.

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