



Communities reap from complementary WASH project under GSF Malawi programme



One of the boys' latrines at Mthira Primary School. In the background is the old latrine.

Only nine months have gone since Traditional Authority (TA) Mwadzama in Nkhotakota District celebrated their Open Defecation Free (ODF) status. While others are grappling to get even, the TA has realised yet another significant achievement other communities can only afford to dream about; eight schools and surrounding communities from Chipelera and Mkaika Zones, have had a massive water and improved sanitation boost through a community-driven Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) initiative.

The Mwadzama Clean Water and Improved Sanitation for Schools and Surrounding Communities Project is a complementary project to the Accelerated Sanitation and Hygiene Practices Programme (ASHPP) supported by the Global Sanitation Fund (GSF). The project, a result of collective effort and will-power from the people of Mwadzama, was financially supported by Plan International Canada to the tune of CAD 250,000 (MWK 125 million) through Hygiene Village Project (HVP)—an indigenous organisation successfully implementing ASHPP in the district. Celebration for official completion of the project was held at Chantondo Primary School ground on 28th July, 2016.

During the colourful event graced by Councillor Gaziele Chimzere, patron for district education at the Nkhotakota

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District Council and Group Village Headman Mwadzama standing in for the TA, various performances were made by community members mainly reiterating words of thanks to Plan International and HVP. From the District Education office, to the headmasters, to the chiefs and even the children themselves, it was clear that that life in the communities benefiting from this project has really transformed. But how did it begin?

Rewind to November 2015, the first TA to achieve ODF under the ASHPP was unveiled. Mwadzama was in a state of elation as their concerted pursuit to make their area ODF with support from HVP was finally realised. But

“good brings good” so the saying goes; Mwadzama’s ODF achievement boomeranged with the WASH initiative that is benefitting over 3000 people in schools and homes. This was an award for the people of Mwadzama for their dedication to make progress through great local leadership and excellent district WASH coordination.

From a critical perspective however, the project was created to address inadequacy of clean water and sanitation facilities in various schools in TA Mwadzama. A situation analysis on which the project is based, indicated that lack of easy access to clean water affected pupils’ attendance to classes especially girls who spent much time fetching water. Again, lack of proper latrines around schools undermined community efforts to deal with open defecation as pupils defecated in nearby waterways, fields and bushes creating poor environmental sanitation conditions in and around the schools.

The 18-month project (January 2015 – June 2016) therefore, ensured the installation of eight boreholes and eight improved latrines in eight and four schools respectively for about 1,444 girls and 1,513 boys in the area. Other project activities included water testing, establishing SchoolWASH (SWASH) Clubs and SWASH competitions in five schools and training pupils on good SWASH practices; community sanitation and hygiene campaigns in five villages; community and school sensitization and mobilization; formation of school and community Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) committees and training of Water Point Committees (Pre-drilling) among other things.

The SWASH competitions, where the eight benefitting schools were competing for MWK 1,000,000 (about CAD 1,800), was done to encourage pupils sustain the cleanliness of their schools. The top four winners are due to get sanitation and hygiene materials of their choice worth MWK 350,000, MWK 300,000, MWK 200,000 and MWK 100,000 respectively.

According to Mr. Bonwell Banda, the Head teacher for Dzanika Primary School, “in the past, pupils used to skip classes as well as get sick very often. Pupils who would come to school one day were usually not the same ones the next day. And again, some of the girl students approaching



Boys from Chantondo School performing a mock news bulleting and girls and boys from Dzanika School performing a song during the celebrations

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— GVH Mwadzama

adolescence were mostly shy at school when menstruating since there was no proper structures to support them. As a result, many of them dropped out.”

Interestingly, recent statistics from the targeted schools indicate that enrolment numbers of girls and boys in the schools have increased from 1,341 to 2,082 and from 1,350 to 1,937 respectively perhaps due to the project.

Beyond the targeted schools, the project is also benefit the communities around who partook in the project activities from the onset including moulding bricks etcetera. The Water and Sanitation and Water Point Committees that have been established for each school are there to ensure that the community members are maintaining the boreholes and latrines efficiently.

Celebrating the achievement, GVH Mwadzama thanked HVP and Plan International for their support.

“We could not have done it on our own. These developments have come in time since this upper side of the area is perpetually dry and the water streams have already dried up. It is therefore my plea that if possible, this initiative should be extended to other places with similar challenges,” said GVH Mwadzama.

The challenges of access to clean water is huge and is characteristic of much of the rural population in Malawi, although access to water through improved sources is at 90% according to the Joint Monitoring Programme Report for 2015. People are still walking very long distances to access clean uncontaminated water. Some households





Some of the pupils demonstrating using the borehole that has been installed at their school.

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—Thoko Kaitane, WASH Manager, Plan International

just do not have enough clean water for washing hands during critical times and as often as possible.

Nonetheless, Plan International through its WASH programming is doing everything possible to support communities address the challenge by having water supply initiatives parallel to the GSF Programme.

“Working with indigenous organisations and supporting local communities and leaders is our way, as Plan International, of ensuring sustainability on initiatives. In this project, together with HVP, we have ensured that both district and local structures in this community have had their capacities

developed to carry out monitoring aspects and maintenance and ensure that the development benefits the people for a long time,” said Mr. Thoko Kaitane, WASH Manager at Plan International Malawi.

From the lessons learnt in the project, it is clear that implementing a clean water supply project alongside a purely sanitation and hygiene programme like the GSF, is important for most rural communities. It is also clear that introduction of sanitation and hygiene competitions and the establishment of WATSAN committees both in communities and at schools has a huge impact on improving sanitation and hygiene in schools and increasing participation in school activities by the communities.



Head teacher from Dzanika Primary School receives dummy cheque on behalf of his school for winning the SWASH competition.

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