Emerging possibilities for institutionalizing CLTS gains to increase sustainable behavior change. A case in Kenya.

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Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Kenya has historically been known to be a preserve of the Ministries of Water, Irrigation and Health. A lot of effort and resources have been invested to improve the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) situation in Kenya with support from development partners and civil society groups. The CSOs have been known to engage with community members and community groups in increasing their access to improved WASH services as well as keeping the government accountable as a duty bearer in service provision.

One of the highly acknowledged and well-known approaches in increasing sanitation globally is Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS). The CLTS approach was adopted by the Kenyan Government through the Ministry of Health in 2009 to increase access to improved sanitation in rural Kenya. The CLTS approach heavily relies on the collective behavior change of communities by invoking disgust and shame around open defecation, and targeting social pressure amongst community members to stop the practice. This approach has been considered successful in Kenya due to several villages being declared open defecation free (ODF). Two counties have been reported as ODF in 2017 – this is no mean feat!

With the successful implementation of the CLTS process comes the question of sustainability, which the WASH practitioners find they need to deal with. This introduces the aspect of slippage – which indicates villages that were once declared open defecation free reverting to open defecation once more. Various ways to ensure sustainability of gains made with the ODF declarations is being explored. One of the highly recommended solutions has been to work with the local government, which has been reported as a great success, especially involving the chiefs from the onset of the intervention through to the ODF celebration.

A big challenge that the WASH implementers have struggled with is the issue of follow-up as sustainability support, with the limited cost of follow-up that is provided. Focus has been on the Village Health Committees (VHCs) or the Community Health Workers (CHWs). This has involved the integration of WASH components into the wider health portfolio that the VHC/CHWs work on in the communities. This has worked well, but then the issue of volunteering vis-à-vis quality assurance of the follow-ups emerges. It is also well noted that with limited financial support of the post ODF follow-ups, the task falls on the VHC/CHWs, who are predominantly women who have been involved in other activities. They are expected to report periodically to the public health officers in the community attached to the sub county offices or the health facilities.

Natural Leaders have been credited with majorly sustaining gains made in increasing access to improved sanitation, playing a critical role in ensuring ODF environments. These leaders comprise of various categories of people in the community. Some are former civil servants, passionate community members, community group leaders or the local/traditional leaders. Sanitation champions have also made a great contribution to ensure that sanitation remains high in the agenda of the various central/state/federal/local governments. These leaders or champions have always aligned closely with line ministries of health, water or irrigation.
The commissioning of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set the bar higher to work in a different way that would consider working innovatively to ensure sustainable benefits to all the targeted recipients. This calls for shifting focus from the traditional WASH practitioners and considering other stakeholders who would provide more impetus in the WASH work. This could include the non-traditional government ministries or public servants who do not have any WASH aspects in their scheme of service. Based on this background, this paper presents the case of a non-traditional WASH champion.

HOW JOSEPHAT BECAME A WASH CHAMPION

Josephat Geteya Onchari, 32, is a WASH champion of his own kind. He was born in Nyanza region, went to school in the Kenyan Rift Valley and attended university in Uganda for his undergraduate studies. He is a trained lawyer who is now pursuing his master’s degree in human resource management in Kenya.

Josephat serves as an Assistant County Commissioner (ACC) in Ithanga Ward, Gatanga Sub County – Murang’a County. He is a public servant in the Administration Unit under the Civil Service. An Assistant County Commissioner in Kenya is an important government official who is in charge of a division or ward, whereby all the chiefs report to him. The ACC is given a security briefing every morning by the chiefs and assistant chiefs. It is this information that is passed on to the Sub County Commissioner who then reports to the County Commissioner, who is accountable to the Regional Coordinator. There are eight Regional Coordinators who are in charge of a cluster of counties that were created due to devolution in 2013.

Josephat sharing his work on MHM during Kenya’s second National Sanitation Conference.

These Regional Coordinators report directly to the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government that is headed by a Cabinet Secretary. The Cabinet Secretary reports directly to the President and briefs the President on security issues every morning. In the same ministry, there is a second Permanent Secretary Position that is occupied by the Inspector General of Police. The Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government is a unique ministry in Kenya, as this is one of the ministries that was not adversely affected by devolution. Thus, security is not a devolved function in Kenya, and it remains a central government responsibility with the President being directly accountable.

Josephats’ sanitation story begins on the first day he got deployed to his reporting station in April 2016, in Ithanga Division, Gatanga Sub County – Murang’a County. Murang’a County has seven sub counties
and is clustered with Nyeri, Kirinyaga and Kiambu counties to form a region under a Regional Coordinator. Josephat’s first day at work was to make a big impact to his life and how he viewed issues in the community, and specifically women. The moment he arrived at the office, he was informed of a meeting that had been set for church elders within the division to discuss sanitation matters. He had been expected to attend the meeting to officially recognize the church elders as well as the sanitation implementers. He took up the opportunity to further engage with the elders, but he did not anticipate to take any longer than a 20-minute “technical appearance”. He found the meeting in session, and very interesting information was being shared about his division. This was a meeting called by the Murang’a Catholic Diocese, under Caritas Murang’a – an implementing partner working under the Kenya Sanitation and Hygiene Improvement Programme (KSHIP), supported by the Global Sanitation Fund (GSF). This meeting was set to carry out institutional triggering to initiate support from the leadership in the Ithanga Division in the CLTS intervention they anticipated to carry out. This meeting had been organized by Ms. Enureta Chebet Ndege, a Project Officer at Caritas Murang’a.

It was the first time that Josephat heard about CLTS and he was triggered in that first meeting that he attended with the church elders! He learned that his division had been identified as one of the areas with very poor sanitation coverage in Murang’a County, thus, its targeting with the CLTS intervention. From then, he decided that he would purpose to make a difference in his area of jurisdiction. The duties of an Assistant County Commissioner include dealing with community issues, especially in relation to development and security. The ACC is impartial in the work they do, as they are not politicians and in most cases they do not hail from the areas that they work in. Government administration jobs are competitive positions and the commissioners are expected to stay impartial in all of their duties, as they represent the presidents’ office at the Divisional level.

Josephat has an interesting way of carrying out his duties, a departure from the conventional commissioners. This stems from the fact that he is of a unique crop of 637 young professionals under the age of 35 years, who were specifically trained by government before deployment that included paramilitary training. These professionals were targeted to facilitate the demystifying of the conventional commissioners’ role, which was previously bureaucratic, transforming the role to be more approachable to the communities. He was posted to Ithanga Division which is considered a hardship area where it is perennially dry with limited food, apart from horticultural products. Josephat does not believe in wielding his authority over the community but prefers to be close to the people, to be able to gather intelligence better. He is highly respected and is provided with high profile authority and security wherever he goes as part of government official protocols. Due to his style of working, he has demystified the role of the commissioners and freely mingles with the people. This has made the flow of information on security easy to access, making his division one of the areas that enjoys relative calm in the region.

Josephat has covered over 68m² in his area of jurisdiction, covering literally every household in the division. He is well known by every household, and most of the households have his cell phone number, so that they can easily reach him at any time. This is not the normal interaction that the communities expect from the commissioners. The ACC visits households to talk to them about sanitation among other development issues, and he talks to them as a neighbor and not an administrator. He has cultivated a good rapport with the communities in general, even the elderly and the vulnerable groups that would ideally not get a commissioner’s attention, such as the disabled or the widowed. He has met several officers in the county and sub county levels to discuss issues on health and sanitation on the behalf of
his division. Josephat is the first ACC in Kenya to be fully trained by KSHIP in the Follow-up MANDONA approach and as ODF verifier.

CHAMPIONING MHM AT THE NATIONAL SANITATION CONFERENCE

The second National Sanitation Conference was held in Nairobi in February 2017, where progress on Kenya’s rural ODF roadmap was discussed in detail, through experience sharing among the various counties and mobilizing county financial commitments on WASH. Participants were drawn from WASH implementers, financing partners, government and community members (Natural Leaders and beneficiaries). There were participants drawn from the 11 sub counties where there are programmes supported by the GSF-supported KSHIP programme. Various sessions discussed themes such as WASH financing, sustainability of WASH services and facilities, innovations in WASH and equality and non-discrimination in WASH. One of the thematic discussions focused on was menstrual hygiene management (MHM). The MHM session discussed various interventions in integrating MHM in CLTS, sanitary napkin products, quality assurance and working with MHM champions.

Josephat taking part in the MHM lab to break the silence on menstruation.

Josephat shared his experience in the MHM session as an MHM champion, encouraging men to be more involved in breaking the silence around MHM. He shared his initial experiences with his girlfriend and a friend of his sister while he was in college and how it felt uneasy then, providing support to the women when they menstruated. He had found himself in a situation where he had to go to the supermarket to buy sanitary towels and he did not know how to go about it, and had to be assisted by the supermarket teller. He managed to get the right sanitary napkin after calling back home, as the queue in the supermarket waited for him to be advised on the phone on the kind of sanitary towel he was to buy! He indicated how he came to the realization of the predicament of the girl child and woman in relation to WASH.

Once the KSHIP-supported Caritas Murang’a triggered him to become a WASH champion in his division, he became determined to contribute towards a better world for women and girls by supporting MHM. Josephat talks about sanitation and menstruation in public meetings that are organized by his office, which ideally are meant to discuss security issues in the division. He even goes as far as demonstrating to the women how to use sanitary towels properly. He took a pledge to protect all the women around him and he keeps on encouraging the men to support the women around them too.
“We (Men) need to be supportive! MHM is not about women... its high time Men took part in it as it affects the men directly or indirectly!”.... “What happens when you come home and you find her in a mood swing? Do you try to find out if she is having her period and she has cramps that make her uncomfortable?”

Josepht challenges the men in the room during the MHM side session at the National Sanitation Conference.

WHAT NEXT?

Josepht looks forward to having his division declared open defecation free by 2018. So far he has ensured that there is over 70 percent toilet coverage in his area. He aims to ensure that every household has access to an improved functional latrine and a handwashing facility. He makes these sanitation follow-ups every time he goes round the division carrying out his ACC work. He decided to make sanitation part of his work despite not having it as part of his scheme of service. Moreover, he uses Follow-up MANDONA during his follow-up visits. He promotes hygiene, especially among the men. He encourages the men to ensure clean compounds, even though this has previously been considered a woman’s chore. He attests to the fact that in his division, the homesteads are very well swept and are kept clean.

Josepht likes to interact with children. He works unconventionally with and through children in the schools. He concurs that children are effective agents of change and indicates that children are very good ambassadors in terms of relaying the hygiene message to their parents. He indicates that he wishes he could facilitate the use of tippy taps in each and every home, but also notes that the children have done very well in taking the knowledge of installing tippy taps for handwashing, from school to home.

He notes that one of the things that has worked very well for him is that the community respects ACCs and holds them in high esteem, meaning that when meetings are called by his office, the community shows up promptly. He has used these forums to promote sanitation and hygiene consistently since he was triggered in April 2016 and looks forward to sharing his experiences as an administrator who has
been deeply involved in WASH work at the grassroots level through a publication, as soon as his division is declared ODF.

Josephat meets with WSSCC’s Executive Director, Dr. Chris Williams, at the National Sanitation Conference.

Josephat aims to eradicate WASH-related preventable diseases in his division as he enjoys triggering people and encouraging them to change their unsafe behavior to sustainable safe WASH behaviour. He indicates that this is possible, and working through the administration is very sustainable. This is because as part of his duty entails receiving daily security reports from chiefs, some of whom are involved in the sanitation work, they could easily report on sanitation progress as well. All that is required is to lobby the executive branch based on the gains made in integrating administrators in WASH, urging them to consider integrating WASH work in the scheme of service of the administrators.

Josephat indicates that the administrators are very accessible and are already employed by the Government in every part of the country. This provides a great network to utilize, to ensure that there is effective follow-up on WASH issues after ODF status is achieved. He also highlights the fact that WASH would be nestled in a very strategic position if administrators are involved and it is included in their scheme of service. This is because administrators like Josephat often participate in national events, providing a strategic platform for them to advocate for WASH issues. A good case in point is the global or national commemoration days such as Menstrual Hygiene Day in May, Global Handwashing Day in October, and World Toilet Day in November. Having an administrator address such public gatherings would create a fundamental shift in how communities consider equality and non-discrimination in WASH matters.

He also emphasizes the importance of supporting the administrators to ensure that the added WASH responsibility is well integrated in their work from the outset. Developing the capacity of these administrators from the start would have a great impact on the sustainability of WASH services and facilities.