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Use of a Natural Leader Network in Liberia to Scale-Up CLTS, a
Sustainable and Cost-Effective Approach

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The USAID-funded IWASH program and the Ministry of Health's CLTS National Technical Coordinating Unit (NTCU) in Liberia are implementing a sustainable cost effective methodology for CLTS by utilizing Natural Leader Networks (NLNs) to trigger and monitor target communities. Planning and monitoring are enhanced by innovative use of GIS mapping.

Since February 2013, 151 rural, non-sewerage communities were triggered and 113 have become ODF. Of 27 communities triggered in August, 10 became ODF within one month.

This Government/NGO partnership is expanding upon this initial success by supporting the creation of NLNs as CLTS implementers. Natural Leaders who have led their own communities to ODF status are encouraged to join NLNs to trigger and monitor neighboring communities to become ODF and provided a small incentive. By using NLNs the cost and complexity of bringing in nonlocal implementers is dramatically reduced. Logistics in rural Liberia is one of the most difficult, time consuming and costly aspects to development. NLs are not provided with transportation for program implementation, and thus are restricted to walking. GIS mapping is used to identify communities proximal to NLN locations and track progress geographically and temporally. Supervision is provided by District Environmental Health Technicians, Country Focal Persons, and IWASH staff. While the long term sustainability of this approach remains to be seen, the use of NLN membership and peer exchange has thus far succeeded in getting local buy-in and forming the foundation for self-sustaining and expanding CLTS.

Scale up activities include hand pumps installation and repair, and soap making.

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Context

Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties are located in the northern part of Liberia with a combined population comprising about 1.26M people, 30%² of the country's 4.2 million inhabitants; they are 3 of the 4 most populous counties in the country. A diversity of dialects is spoken in each county. The counties are accessed by a partially paved highway; all other roads are dirt and generally in very poor condition. According to the 2011, 62% of Liberia's rural population practiced open defecation. Global Communities has implemented the USAID-funded Improved Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (IWASH) program in these counties since February 2010 with the goal of making measurable improvements in WASH; about 100,000 people in the target areas will benefit from access to improved sanitation facilities through CLTS. In 2013 the program focus has become sustainable CLTS.

The initiative

For eight months, IWASH implemented a CLTS program driven by a team of IWASH and Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) employees. In the past 1.5 months IWASH shifted to an implementation model that utilizes a network of Natural Leaders that have brought their communities to ODF.

The staffing structure has county level supervisors for both IWASH and MOHSW, and district level IWASH monitors as well as MOHSW Environmental Health Technicians (DEHTs). In the original model IWASH Monitors transporting DEHTs on motorbikes to CLTS communities for triggering and monitoring; given the poor road infrastructure in Liberia and remoteness of villages, this system resulted in significant travel time and 4 to 7 months between triggering and achievement of ODF status due to insufficient monitoring. Additionally, transportation costs ran high. In August 2013, the Natural Leader Network (NLN) pilot was introduced as a lower cost and more sustainable CLTS implementation methodology.

Natural Leaders (NLs) who have led their own communities to ODF status are invited to join the NLN of their district to trigger and monitor neighboring communities. It is assumed that NLs travel by foot as transport costs are not directly reimbursed. The NLs, who operate in pairs, may travel to as many proximal communities as their mobility allows and can trigger on their own schedule, with support and supervision by IWASH/MOHSW. NLN members benefit from additional training and oversight from IWASH staff, County Focal Persons and DEHTs, and hold regular meetings. NLN members who bring at least one other community to ODF status are rewarded through both performance-based financial incentives and the elevated status of Community Champion. This approach creates an organic growth model, where the network of CLTS communities expands from the first triggered community in an area to an expanding circle of neighboring villages.

This process requires monitoring, which is enhanced by the innovative use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Through geographic and temporal mapping it is easy to see where the NLNs are successful and expanding, and where additional support is needed. This GIS service will be available to any WASH partner in Liberia and will be handed over to MOHSW through the program exit strategy.

IWASH also engages members of NLN in maintaining the rural water supply. Hand pump maintenance is the primary barrier to water access in rural Liberia. NLN members have been trained in pump repair, soap making and small business management. Given initial contracts to repair

² Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services. (May 2009). 2008 National Population and Housing Census.

institutional hand pumps, they are now working as independent WASH entrepreneurs to provide pump repair services as well as WaterGuard and soap to rural communities.

IWASH supports the establishment and continuing functionality of county- and district-level CLTS steering committees, both of which hold monthly meetings and conduct regular field visits. IWASH supports these committees with monitoring logistics and snacks on travel days. These committees play an important role in overseeing the NLN and communicating the status of the program within the local government structures.

IWASH is also implementing a social marketing program including radio dramas, street theatre, and market day activities. Attaining ODF status is being linked with community pride and NLN members are portrayed as agents of community development. The tag line for the “ODF brand” is “Improved Sanitation, the path to development”. This campaign is expected to increase interest and induce communities to request CLTS triggering.

CLTS implementation occurs at the subnational level, but the IWASH program has remained a key partner of MOHSW in developing national strategy and policy for CLTS, assisting in the development of the *Guidelines for CLTS Implementation in Liberia*.

Success and Limitations

The initial performance of the NLN is very successful compared to the model of IWASH and MOHSW direct CLTS implementation. Using the original model, 120 communities were triggered in February 2013, 61 communities were verified ODF in June and 52 communities were verified ODF in August/September. This is a 50% success rate at 4 months and a cumulative 86% success rate at 6 to 7 months. Using the NLN model, 27 communities were triggered in August and 19 were verified ODF by early October, a 70% success rate in only 6 weeks. In addition to these successes, 4 communities nearby those triggered by NLNs, were caught up in the enthusiasm and “self triggered”. All 4 communities went ODF within a month.

This success is due to many factors, but the most important may be that the NLN members are from the same clan as the CLTS target community. This means that they speak the same language, they understand the social dynamics of the community, and they can draw on the clan leadership to support them in influencing the target community to attain ODF status. NLNs are organized around districts but reaches to clan level (the officially-recognized classification beyond administrative district) which reflects affiliation with traditional leadership. Clan, zone and paramount chiefs are regularly involved in triggering and validation, pressuring lagging communities to make progress and attending ODF celebrations; some have publicly stated that all communities under their leadership will go ODF. There is some indication, by the example of the “self triggered” communities, that once the momentum gets built CLTS could become a social movement that spreads without external incentives or pressure.

In addition to being localized and aligned with the institutional framework of the Liberian government and culture, NLs must ensure that their own communities remain ODF to retain NLN membership; their communities are periodically checked by on by fellow members.

Though the NLN approach required initial investment through additional trainings, oversight on NLN-led triggering by IWASH staff and government officials and increased supervision, overall it has reduced program costs. The largest reduction in cost comes in transportation; instead of funding the transportation of IWASH Monitors and EHTs to visit triggered communities 3-4 times a week, NLN members now monitor by foot with no upfront payment. Savings in transportation cost have been shifted to the performance-based incentives. Each pair of NLs receive USD\$130, or \$65 each, if a community they have triggered is verified as ODF. In an effort to dissuade several triggering with insufficient monitoring, participants are only paid a lump sum upon declaration of ODF status, not in

instalments. For comparison of related costs, the government requests that communities are awarded a standard sanitation kit upon ODF verification which costs USD \$120.

IWASH set an initial target of six triggered communities per county (18 total) for the first month of implementation, August 2013. The NLN actually triggered 27 communities. For October, the target increases to 36 communities, but already 51 communities have requested triggering. This minimum target of 36 communities per month (6 per target district or 12 per county) will continue for 6 months. Though the NLN is showing promising results, IWASH has faced challenges around capacity development of government, especially at subnational level. When establishing the NLN, which places a high priority on existing structures, IWASH staff found that several subnational government officials were under-capacitated to fulfil their roles as assigned by MOHSW and MPW. Most were unaware of the full scope of their job description and the policies, plans and guidelines that affect them. A 2012 Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) study of 105 government employees highlighted this challenge in its findings, including the following: 43 percent of respondents reported not knowing their division mission statement; 91 percent reported not knowing of the various policies and strategies of the WASH Sector; and over 90 percent had never attended a training or workshop on relevant policies and guidelines.

In response, IWASH hosted policy dissemination workshops for local government official at the county and district levels. Facilitators from each of the WASH related ministries (MOHSW, MPW, Ministry of Lands and Mines, and Ministry of Internal Affairs) described each of the WASH policies and technical guidelines, as well as the role of local government in implementation. The responses to the workshops were very favourable and in each county and district WASH development plans were developed through the workshop process. IWASH has also participated recently in a review and planning session for County EHT Coordinators, presenting the IWASH model for CLTS as well as performance to date. As a result, each County EHT Coordinator developed a CLTS plan for their county. These form the basis for a national CLTS plan for Liberia.

IWASH has also run into challenges at national level. Though the MOHSW National Technical Coordinating Unit (NTCU) for CLTS has been strengthened in the last year, it remains understaffed and underfunded. The NTCU is responsible for verification of ODF nationally and instrumental in capacity building MOHSW staff at county and district levels. They are also responsible for training and supporting any new implementing partner (INGO or LNGO) involved in CLTS. Yet they lack any resources for independent mobility and they have less than 10 field capable staff.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

IWASH has produced many lessons since its inception in February 2010. The primary lesson learned has been around the potential of NLs, which led to the NLN and Wash Entrepreneurs. More generally, lessons include: 1) the value of engaging the NTCU in all stages of implementation from planning to ODF verification to developing the capacity of subnational government officials, 2) the importance of integrating CLTS into existing institutional structures through awareness raising workshops, 3) the importance of county- and district-level steering committees, and 4) the benefit of promoting CLTS through social marketing activities. In addition, IWASH has the first indications that CLTS could expand as a social movement, driven by community members desire to keep up with their neighbours and the messages they are hearing about on the radio. Finally, CLTS has the potential to drive a WASH private sector in rural areas as a greater awareness of basic sanitation, hygiene and safe water leads to demand for WASH products and services. WASH entrepreneurs have a livelihood potential which will reinforce messages of safe water utilization, improved sanitation and hygiene. Stepping up

the sanitation ladder will require material and service delivery to remote communities and the WASH entrepreneurs are well placed to meet this demand.

The way forward for CLTS under IWASH is focused on the NLN and the gradual handing over of IWASH staff responsibilities to government. The NLN will continue to grow in terms of geography, membership and number of triggered communities in the counties of Bong, Lofa and Nimba. IWASH estimates that by May 2014, more than 200 communities will be triggered by the NLN; at that point, NLN-led CLTS communities will outnumber IWASH-led CLTS communities. It is expected that new IWASH-led triggerings will only occur in large peri-urban communities, a new implementation environment for the program. In December 2013, IWASH will move into government offices to intensify programmatic handover and by June 2014, IWASH will leave county-based operations, but will continue to conduct monthly field visits from Monrovia. This transition has been prefaced by the current model of co-supervision between IWASH County Supervisors and County CLTS Focal Person as well as IWASH Monitors and DEHTs.

Scaling up this project will build on the success in bringing communities to ODF status. In the next year IWASH will develop safe water and hygiene promotion campaigns to implement through the NLNs. IWASH funded a hygiene specialist to develop national hygiene promotion guideline for Liberia and is investigating creating a hygiene promotion methodology specific to Liberia, which complements CLTS well as a scale up activity. A pared down version of PHAST is under consideration. A social market campaign for safe water usage is also being discussed with all significant stakeholders in safe water in Liberia. WaterGuard© (WG) is a 1.25% sodium hypochlorite solution manufactured in Liberia, approved by MOHSW and promoted through IWASH and UNICEF to make water safe for drinking. WG is promoted at ODF celebrations and will be increasingly aligned with the scale-up of CLTS under IWASH.

Finally, IWASH will continue to develop the capacity of government staff, specifically those of MOHSW and MPW. At national level IWASH is heavily involved in the effort to enhance the national CLTS guidelines through a second version and standardization of relevant tools and materials. At subnational level, the IWASH staff will continue to co-supervise with County Focal Persons and DEHTs until June 2014.