



‘Our listeners are really beginning to understand the importance of using soap for hand-washing’: SWIFT changes hygiene behaviour through local radio broadcasts

What has changed?

Among residents of Lodwar in Turkana County, in Kenya’s northern Arid and Semi-Arid Lands region, open defecation is common practice, and awareness of the importance of hygiene behaviours such as hand-washing with soap, treating drinking water and using latrines is low.

However, things have changed since local radio station Radio Maata (meaning ‘greetings’) began producing and broadcasting informative, interactive and locally relevant programmes and public service announcements which promote the adoption of good sanitation and hygiene practices.

‘Since starting the WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) programme, our listeners are really beginning to understand the importance of using soap for hand-washing, especially when handling food and after visiting the latrine,’ says Elim Baasha, a presenter on Radio Maata, who says he knows this because of the feedback he receives from listeners.

The programmes also play a key role in facilitating discussions between communities, civil society and government, as county government staff are among the listeners, Elim says. ‘When we get calls from people, these public health officers are also hearing where the problems are, and can go and rectify them,’ he explains.

How has the change been achieved?

Elim, who has been broadcasting on Radio Maata for 18 months, is one of a number of local radio station presenters to have been trained by BBC Media Action under the SWIFT programme. He has been working with ‘broadcast mentor’ Patrick Mulehi to learn how to produce programmes on water, sanitation and hygiene which raise awareness and promote good practice.

‘I never knew what WASH was until we started working with Patrick,’ says Elim, who began by introducing what he was learning about the importance of hand-washing with soap, treating water and using latrines to his own family, and now discusses his experiences on air.

Elim broadcasts from 8 to 10 am every Monday morning, with each programme covering a different theme. ‘One time we only talked about flies for two hours, another time we talked about latrines, another school health, another water treatment, and so on,’ Elim explains.

Why does it matter?

Formative research conducted by BBC Media Action in the areas of Kenya in which it is working under the SWIFT programme found that, across the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands, most of those surveyed said diseases such as diarrhoea, typhoid and stomach complaints

were common. Many recalled a significant number of cholera outbreaks, especially during the dry seasons, and reported that trachoma was still a major problem, especially among children.

In Turkana, most people defecate around bushes and along rivers, even in areas where latrines are accessible, and communities do not link cleanliness to health. The broadcasts supported by BBC Media Action are addressing local attitudes and cultural barriers to using latrines and hand-washing with soap, and increasing awareness of the negative impacts of open defecation through simple, coordinated, long-term campaigns.

By doing so, they are playing a significant role in improving the health of Lodwar residents and helping to reduce the incidence of disease.

What are the challenges?

Water scarcity is a significant challenge to changing hygiene behaviour in Turkana. Many communities rely heavily on seasonal rivers and shallow wells, and travelling long distances to access water is common. Unsurprisingly, the use of clean water is therefore carefully prioritised.

Deep-rooted local attitudes and practices around hygiene and sanitation also present a challenge, Elim says. 'People are living in dirty conditions but they think they are okay. Often people say, "What are you saying? We are okay. Why are you telling us to do these things?" It is our job to challenge these beliefs and to inform people so they can change their behaviour.'



Elim Baasha, Radio Maata

How will the challenges be met and what makes this change sustainable?

BBC Media Action's work with local radio stations is just one aspect of the SWIFT programme, which is also working to increase access to safe water in Kenya's dry northern region. In Lodwar, for example, Oxfam and Practical Action are working in partnership with the Lodwar Water and Sanitation Company (LOWASCO) to drill boreholes and equip them with

pumping systems.

With regard to how local radio stations can help tackle cultural barriers and influence behaviour change, Elim says this is one of the topics that he and the other presenters being mentored by BBC Media Action discuss during their training sessions.

"We want the county government to be active about water"

Broadcast mentor Patrick has introduced Elim to health officers and other experts who can talk about WASH issues on his programme and lend their weight to the arguments, as well as supporting him to think about how best to discuss topics on air. Other key skills Elim has picked up are editing pre-recorded material and putting together public service announcements, jingles and promos.

In addition to making his programmes more effective, the skills and experience Elim has gained from working with BBC Media Action have increased the long-term capacity of Radio Maata to produce high-quality radio programmes and support local debates and discussions between communities, civil society and policymakers.



Broadcast mentor Patrick Mulehi

And to help ensure that changes in hygiene and sanitation behaviour are sustainable, the station is also playing an important role in promoting accountability for WASH issues among local authorities, and empowering its listeners to demand better services.

'We want the county government to be active about water,' explains Elim. 'We've had the County Health Commissioner and County Public Health Officer appear on the programme twice. They have been very co-operative. When people ring in with questions, they are there to give a quick response. They also get to hear the audience's concerns, and that is a good thing.'

Stories and photos collected by Jane Beesley, freelance humanitarian communications specialist, and edited by Emma Feeny (Oxfam).

The SWIFT Consortium works to provide access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene to people in Kenya and DRC, and builds capacity to ensure services are sustainable. It is funded with UK aid from the British people.