



Maureen Ndamwe, Radio Maata, Turkana, Kenya

‘It takes a minimal amount of time to reach a lot of people’: 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.

‘When people phone in, they tell us how they used to collect water, and if it looked clean they would drink it,’ says Maureen Ndamwe, a presenter on Radio Maata. ‘But now, because they have listened to the programme, they say they know that untreated water can affect their health, and have learned how to treat water to make it safe for drinking.’

Maureen believes the impact of the broadcasts is already visible in Lodwar. ‘Through the radio programmes, I think the people living in Lodwar town are starting to understand the importance of using toilets and not openly defecating,’ she says. ‘Now, when I walk through town I can see a difference.’

How has the change been achieved?

Maureen, who has been broadcasting on Radio Maata for two years, is one of a number of local radio station presenters to have been trained by BBC Media Action under the SWIFT programme. She 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.

‘We have been learning about behaviour change and how, as radio presenters, we can produce programmes that can influence that,’ Maureen explains. ‘Some of the topics we’ve looked at include informing the community about why, and how, they should stop open defecation, how to treat water to make it safe for drinking and how to maintain good hygiene.’

Maureen presents her water, sanitation and hygiene-focused programme every Wednesday in Kiswahili. ‘I pre-record part of the programme and that is broadcast between 3 and 3.30 in the afternoon. For example, I interviewed food handlers in Lodwar town about food hygiene,’ she says. ‘I then follow this with a 30-minute, live discussion. Members of the community are encouraged to phone in with questions, comments and to tell us about their experiences. For the live session, I invite experts to come into the studio to answer questions and to give more information.’

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, a bacterial eye infection, 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.



Maureen Ndamwe, Radio Maata

What are the challenges?

Challenging local attitudes and practices around hygiene and sanitation has not been straightforward, Maureen says. 'We often have to find ways to convince people to change their behaviour.'

Another key issue in Turkana is water scarcity. 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.

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

Maureen believes bringing in recognised specialists to discuss hygiene and sanitation matters has helped to challenge the attitudes and practices

of her audience. 'We bring in experts who can talk knowledgeably about the subject,' she says. 'For example, when we talked about why treating water is so important, we brought in an expert from the county authority.'



Training session conducted by BBC Media Action

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 to drill boreholes and equip them with pumping systems.

Producing radio broadcasts alongside tackling practical issues of water scarcity is an effective way of changing hygiene behaviour, Maureen believes, particularly because of the role played by women and children, who make up a large proportion of her audience. 'The station covers a radius of 250km and so... it takes a minimal amount of time to reach a lot of people,' she says.

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In addition, the skills and experience Maureen has gained from working with BBC Media Action have increased the capacity of Radio Maata and its long-term effectiveness as a local broadcaster.

'I've been learning more about how to communicate with people, how to interview different people and how to package programmes, and my skills on editing and reading the news are improving,' Maureen says. 'This training programme is really encouraging me to learn more, and is teaching me skills I can use when I present other programmes.'

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.

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