



Ivoni Ebunga and Community Health Club members, Katchungwe, South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo

‘This club is now the light of our village’: A community health club set up by SWIFT promotes health and well-being in Katchungwe

What has changed?

Katchungwe is a semi-urban village in South Kivu, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In the past, defecation took place mostly in the surrounding bush. Hand-washing with soap or ash wasn’t practised, the importance of hygiene in preparing food wasn’t understood, and discarded rubbish rotted in the roads.

‘We were in darkness before,’ remembers Sifa Makolo. ‘During those days we knew nothing. We didn’t really know how to live well, and that’s why we had a lot of problems with diseases. We drank dirty water. We had to go to the clinic a lot. We didn’t really understand at all.’

Now, however, as a result of work done through the SWIFT programme, the village has been transformed. Many families have constructed rubbish pits and household latrines with hand-washing facilities, and awareness of the importance of hygiene practices such as hand-washing and around the preparation of food has improved dramatically.

How has the change been achieved?

Tearfund with the support of Africa AHEAD has been helping communities in South Kivu to set up Community Health Clubs, an approach being piloted by the SWIFT

programme in semi-urban areas of DRC. Membership of the clubs is voluntary, free and open to all, and each club typically has 50-100 members.

The clubs hold weekly discussions on health and hygiene topics, such as the safe storage of drinking water, or making soap to ensure ready availability. Members are given practical assignments; for example, digging a refuse pit, or making a dish rack to dry dishes off the ground.

These assignments are monitored, and members receive stamps and certificates for attending sessions and completing tasks.

The Community Health Club in Katchungwe village, which is home to 215 households, has 102 members and meets every Sunday.

‘The purpose of the club is to change our old way of life and to have a new and better life in the future,’ says one of them, Mwajuma Kiza. ‘Before, we didn’t have latrines, and would go to the bush. Now we have latrines and know the importance of hand-washing.’

‘We have already constructed something in every household: latrines, tippy-taps (hand-washing facilities), showers, rubbish pits and drying racks,’ says Makeni Salima. ‘Now we have our own latrines and we have improved kitchens.’

Why does it matter?

Within a few short months of the club being established, residents of Katchungwe noticed significant improvements in their health and well-being.

'I'm very happy now,' says Mwajuma. 'When I go to the fields, I collect vegetables to prepare for a meal, and thanks to the training in the health club, I now know how to prepare them properly. Thanks to the club meetings and trainings every Sunday, the number of diseases and cases of sickness in the community have diminished.'

M'to Aoci has also seen the benefits of the Community Health Club membership.

'In the health club, information about improving our health is shared with us and discussed,' she says. 'We have also learned about what types of food are good for nutrition, and how to prepare them for good health, and this is benefiting our children.'



Sifa Makolo, Katchungwe

What are the challenges?

The challenge for Katchungwe now is to maintain the smooth running of the Community Health Club, ensuring that members do not fall back into their old ways in terms of open defecation and poor hygiene habits, in order to establish long-term health improvements.

The club must also try to ensure that the new behaviours are adopted by the majority of Katchungwe's residents, including non-members, in order to minimise the risk of sickness and disease spreading in the village.

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

Community Health Clubs are given a sound long-term footing, run as they are by management committees composed of president, vice-president, secretary, vice-secretary, treasurer, vice-treasurer and two water technicians.

These committees work in collaboration with the head of the village and the facilitator of the dialogue sessions: typically a community resident with reading and writing skills who has been trained by Africa AHEAD and Tearfund.

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Mwajuma Kiza is confident that improved sanitation and hygiene behaviours will spread quickly from club members to other village residents.

'We share what we learn with our neighbours, and our neighbours tell us they are going to work on these things because they want to do what we are doing as well,' she explains. 'My neighbours say: "It is a good development and we want to take part too." And we will continue to encourage others too.'

Like other club members, Ivoni Ebunga is determined that the improvements in hygiene and sanitation witnessed in Katchungwe are only the beginning.



M'to Aoci and Community Health Club members

'We want development in our village and we want to go far,' she says. 'This club has changed us, because we know things now that we didn't know before.'

Sifa Makolo too sees the Community Health Club as a long-term village institution that will help create sustainable improvements in health and well-being.

'If we keep this club and we keep following the training, we will see more changes, because before we were in darkness and now we see the light,' she says.

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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