Going Beyond ODF: Combining Sanitation Marketing with Participatory Approaches to Sustain ODF Communities in Malawi

INTRODUCTION

The majority of households in rural Malawi construct traditional latrines with a lifespan of less than 12 months. The short lifespan of traditional latrines calls into question the sustainability of ODF status in rural villages. The typical range of sanitation products tends to be extremely limited and options are often prohibitively expensive for rural householders. High costs were commonly associated with cement prices in Malawi - USD12 per 50kg.

This Field Note records the experiences to date of developing a national sanitation marketing programme. A 7-step sanitation marketing framework is used to frame the discussion. The hybrid approach developed included elements of participatory design, CLTS and capacity building in low-cost construction and marketing.

As part of a technical training session, masons learn how to build a corbelled pit latrine.

KEY POINTS

- The sanitation marketing programme in Malawi builds on the success of the existing CLTS programme by empowering partners in participatory approaches in sanitation design, marketing and business modelling.

- Active participation of government partners was promoted through engaging district-level staff in the collection and analysis of market research.

- Participatory design sessions for low-cost sanitation generated innovative designs which are steadily gaining acceptance across rural Malawi.

- Developing a long-term partnership with a local university ensured innovative designs are tested, refined and disseminated across rural Malawi.

- Participatory approaches have ensured the sanitation marketing programme has a pro-poor emphasis that is appropriate for rural villages.

- Sustainable and profitable business models is an ongoing pursuit across rural Malawi.
**DESCRIPTION OF INTERVENTION**

**Figure 1 – Overview of key elements of Malawi’s national sanitation marketing programme (and inset UNICEF’s seven step sanitation marketing framework)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Assessment and planning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Government, private sector and NGO partners expressed strong support to explore new approaches to sustain ODF achievements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• UNICEF staff collated numerous stories of ODF slippage due to collapsing latrines</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Conducted market research in partnership with three district government partners</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Results presented to National Forum to share and encourage government, NGO and private sector partners to engage in SanMark programmes</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Market research</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Assess market and partnership conditions (in context of CATS where applicable)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Understand poor household consumers and local market providers, retailers, and supply chains</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Product Design</td>
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<td>• Local designs were developed through participatory approaches that align with CATS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Designs were tested and refined to ensure safety and durability – emphasis was then required for quality assurance and certification processes</td>
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<td>• Design and test affordable, desirable, sanitation product/service options</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Test supply-side strategy</td>
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<td>• Local university utilised their experience in training and education to provide training to private sector and government in affordable, durable and locally available sanitation products</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Followed up 30 sanitation entrepreneurs with regular phone calls to record sales volumes and discuss key challenges to business growth</td>
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<td>• Design &amp; test supply chain &amp; business models</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Test demand-side strategy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Utilised participatory design to develop logo and tagline to support demand creation for corbelled latrine</td>
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<td>• Logo has received positive feedback from sanitation entrepreneurs as an effective marketing tool</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Design &amp; test promotional &amp; marketing activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>SanMark programme implementation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Trained 7 districts in low-cost, corbelled latrine construction</td>
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<td>• National demand creation programme is being developed by local marketing company</td>
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<td>• Business models are still under development to confirm the estimated profit margins based on direct and intermediary sales</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Piloting and roll out SanMark activities (in context of CATS where applicable)</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Monitoring</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Partnered with local university to conduct regular phone-based monitoring with sanitation businesses</td>
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<td>• Monitor for results and equity</td>
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Step 1: Assessment and Planning

Malawi has high coverage of basic sanitation in rural areas (up to 90%). Looking at this statistic in isolation suggests that Malawi is fast moving towards open defecation free status and towards improved sanitation in alignment with the National ODF strategy and ongoing national level CLTS programmes that are characterized by strong integration with the health sector and high levels of ODF certification. However, anecdotal stories reported that existing sanitation products were not matching the expectation of households as they regularly collapsed. Prior to launching the sanitation marketing programme, the WASH team conducted a situation analysis of the sanitation context in Malawi. The analysis identified the following features:

- CLTS programmes had been widely adopted and accepted as a successful strategy for increasing sanitation coverage by national and district government partners.
- Aligning to the philosophy of CLTS would improve the likelihood of acceptance and uptake by government partners.
- New sanitation products needed to align to the strained economic conditions (inflation rates of 23%) of the majority of rural households and needed to utilise locally available building materials and skills.
- There is limited evidence of private sector engagement in the rural sanitation sector.
- Rural areas have poor road infrastructure, high transport costs and very high costs of cement.

Based on these features, the WASH team recognised that applying a pro-poor, participatory approach that aligned to the CLTS philosophy would present the greatest likelihood of achieving results, at scale, in Malawi. The approach recognised that participatory engagement of government staff, villagers and suppliers was necessary throughout the design, implementation and evaluation of the programme.

Step 2: Market Research

Sanitation marketing programmes in other African countries utilised the services of professional market research firms. After consideration of the local context, UNICEF Malawi opted to engage one international consultant to work in partnership with local government to conduct the market research process. This approach was chosen because:

1. UNICEF Malawi recognised the importance of engaging government partners at the commencement of the SanMark programme;
2. CLTS had demonstrated strong success in Malawi and the arrival of SanMark, without adequate government engagement, may have resulted in limited support from government agencies; and
3. as a cost-saving measure as it removed the costs associated with engaging a professional market research firm.

The market research confirmed that existing sanitation products were prone to collapse during the rainy season due to water damaging the walls and flooring and/or termites eating through the wood used to create the floor. This resulted in users returning to open defecation or being forced to share latrines every 6 – 12 months. The research clearly demonstrated the majority of rural householders have limited access to cash combined with cement being an expensive and rare product in rural communities. Householders provided a clear and consistent message “I will not use cement for my toilet before I have cement for my house!”

Step 3: Product Design

Based on the market research findings, UNICEF Malawi recognised the need to develop a new range of sanitation products and services. These products had to be affordable, durable and use locally-available building materials. However, to ensure the programme retained scale, through support from government, a design process was chosen to align with the CLTS methodology.

Sanitation marketing programmes in Cambodia, Vietnam and Kenya engaged international design consultants to support the process for designing new sanitation products and services. An alternative design approach was used in Malawi. The approach chosen was participatory design. Participatory design aligns with the process of CLTS as it engages and empowers local people to design, create and identify affordable and long-
lasting sanitation products. UNICEF Malawi engaged district government partners to conduct three-day participatory design sessions in three districts.

The sessions brought together government, masons and local villagers to explore, design and prototype designs for sanitation products.

The three-day workshop is summarised below:

**Day 1: Exploring and discovering** – teams formed that include equal numbers of government, masons and local villagers. Each team used flipcharts and pens to draw the existing toilet designs. The advantages and disadvantages of each design were discussed and presented next to each design. A human-centred design challenge is then presented to each team e.g., ‘can we design a toilet that matches what the majority of villagers want, need and can afford using only local materials?’ The teams then had 2 hours to draw and discuss numerous design options that address the design challenge. Teams then identified the three top designs that they wish to prototype the next day.

**Day 2: Prototyping and feedback** – each team was provided with the local building materials required to construct their prototypes. Prototyping allowed each team to trial and test their designs in three dimensions using real materials. Local villagers were encouraged to visit the prototyping sites and provide comments and ideas on the designs.

**Day 3: Budgeting** – the teams listed all the building materials used in the prototypes and their cost. The labour costs were then calculated.

Through this process, numerous innovations in pit lining, flooring and roof construction were identified for further testing and refinement.

### Step 4: Test supply-side strategy

After an extensive search, UNICEF Malawi identified Mzuzu University as a partner to test, refine and display the sanitation designs. As an extension of the Centre of Excellence in Water and Sanitation at Mzuzu University, the SMART Centre demonstrates a range of low-cost technologies and has capacity to train local entrepreneurs in water and sanitation technologies with a focus on ‘self supply’. Training also includes business skills, linking them and their customers to micro-financing institutions.

The SMART Centre conducted a rigorous testing process of the designs that emanated from the participatory design sessions. The testing process included load testing by placing a 100kg weight on the corbelled structure for a 20 day period, photography of structural integrity and identifying suitable mixture ratios for mud mortar. These processes were refined over a three-month period and structural engineers were consulted on the durability of the corbelled design. The prototypes are now positioned within the grounds of the SMART Centre alongside low-cost water pump facilities.

The SMART Centre then developed an easy-to-use guideline for corbelled, burnt-brick latrine construction. The manual includes site selection, soil confirmation and a step-by-step guide to construction. This manual has been successfully used to train masons, government and non-government partners in the safe construction of corbelled latrines.

Identifying the right people to train was the next challenge. The pilot programme attempted to attract people with existing small businesses. The logic was that the business people would be capable of running and promoting a sanitation business. However, evaluation of the pilot showed that the business people did not have sufficient building skills to be confident to promote and market the corbelled latrine. The most successful sales were by people with a background in masonry and who currently owned a small business.

District government partners were asked to identify masons in a catchment areas demonstrating strong success in CLTS programmes. Masons had to have a proven reputation for high quality construction,
be older than 25 years of age and constructed a latrine in the previous six months. The incentive for masons included the technical training offered and the exposure to new business skills.

Photos capturing various elements of the participatory design and training process.

**Step 5: Test a demand creation strategy**

The promotional campaign was developed by a local marketing agency. To continue the application of participatory approaches the marketing agency conducted three design sessions in partnership with local villagers in three districts. Below is an outline of the process and outcomes from the design sessions.

**Introductions:** The facilitator indicated that he had a special interest in names that had a meaning or could tell a story. Participants with such names were asked to share the stories behind their names and what their names stood for. The group were asked to pay attention to the reasons why certain names are given and the messages or memories such names carry.

**Names, meanings and stories behind the names:** Following the introductions, the group was divided into two and asked to discuss the origins and meaning of the names of people, places and geographical features. Then participants selected four of the most interesting names to share in plenary. This exercise triggered the group to think about how names come about and what messages they carry.

**Listing names of brands they frequently buy:** Participants were asked about the branded products they frequently buy i.e. brand names. Questions to participants included; what does the name entail? Does it carry a message or a promise? Do the names have an influence on buyers? Brand names mentioned by participants included soap, cooking oil and salt. Participants made connections between brand names and the functional benefits of the products (e.g. Butex will make your skin beautiful).

**Presentation of a low cost, durable toilet designs:** The participants were asked to identify names that represented this product and would encourage consumers to purchase the product. It was emphasized that the name should symbolize strength, durability, reliability and confidence.

Animal names were frequently suggested (in order of popularity: elephant, hippo and lion). The justification for these names was that as heavy as an elephant or hippo may be, the strength of this toilet design can carry the weight of these animals. According to participants, the image of lion would make people feel safe using the toilet because of its strength. Participants also suggested other names: “Njanje” (a piece of railway track; a symbol of strength in daily language). “Mwalamwala” (rock strong). “Kachiluli” (a store for farm produce designed to last and has the same shape of a trapezium toilet).

**Messages:** Participants were asked to develop messages or slogans that would communicate the key features of the long-lasting, affordable toilet, one element of branding. Participants’ suggestions included:

- “…ndi mwalamwala” (As strong as a rock);
• “Amuna apumule” (Men must rest- alluding to the fact that men are constantly reconstructing toilets at present);

• “Cha zakazaka” (Lasts for years and years).

Two of the slogans were combined to come up with the tagline for the latrine and an image of an elephant was used to create the logo. Additional marketing materials will include branded work outfits for all masons, banners to advertise the prices of latrines and promotion of masons at marketing events.

**Step 6: SanMark Programme Implementation**

The programme was recently scaled-up to seven districts in Malawi.

At the time of writing, more than 60 corbelled latrines had been sold in the two pilot areas. Prices ranged from USD 6 – 30, depending on the provision of materials and the ability of customers to pay. For example, masons have reported charging companies a higher price than families with lower incomes.

**Step 7: Monitoring results and equity**

Monitoring was supported with a grant from the SHARE Research Consortium (funded by DFID) to Mzuzu University. Monitoring of all masons during the pilot phase was conducted on a weekly basis and included phone calls and one-to-one interviews with all trained masons.

**OUTCOME**

Since late 2013, a total of 61 sanitation business people have been trained in corbelled latrine construction and small business management. Intensive, in-district training sessions are complemented by Master Trainers at district level.

To date, a total of 110 corbelled latrines have been sold across rural Malawi. Prices range from USD 6 – 30 depending on the contribution of labour and materials from customers.

Traditional leaders in two districts have been briefed on the corbelled latrine and recognise its potential to dramatically improve the lifespan of sanitation facilities. Their endorsement of the latrines improves the likelihood of sustaining ODF status in their villages.
LESSONS LEARNED

- Aligning the sanitation marketing programme to the philosophy of CLTS ensured strong interest from national and district government partners.

- Participatory approaches were successful in empowering government, villagers and sanitation suppliers to engage in the sanitation marketing programme.

- Developing a long-term partnership with a local university has created a hub of knowledge, innovation and training for the sanitation sector in Malawi.

- The approach requires substantial inputs including quality assurance of local building materials and training to build the necessary skills to run a sanitation business. The sustainability of this approach requires further monitoring.

NEXT STEPS

With UNICEF support, the SMART Centre has become a knowledge hub and recognised trainer in corbelled latrine design. UNICEF Malawi is partnering with the SMART Centre to train masons and government staff in 15 districts across Malawi in the technical and management aspects of creating a sanitation business.

More than fifteen sanitation businesses are now operating across rural Malawi: an early finding is that some businesses are focusing on sales and monitoring and sub-contracting the corbelling.

During 2015 the focus will be on improving the business model for these enterprises including recruiting the right people with the traits of successful businesspeople and providing a professional development programme to help them take advantage of market opportunities (including mentoring, training and business planning).

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PHOTO CREDITS

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This Field Note is part of the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Sanitation and Hygiene Learning Series, designed to improve knowledge of best practice and lessons learnt in sanitation and hygiene programming across the Region. The series has been funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in support of improved knowledge management in the sanitation sector.

The documents in this series cover the following topics:

- CLTS in fragile contexts
- CLTS at-scale
- Small towns sanitation
- Mobile-enabled sanitation and hygiene programming
- Regional supply chains for sanitation
- Sanitation marketing
- Handwashing with soap

For more information on the series please email Ann Thomas: anthomas@unicef.org

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