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EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE WASH SERVICES:
FUTURE CHALLENGES IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

Promoting CLTS in Conflict Zones – South Sudan

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Background

Open defecation is recognised as a crucial public health issue. South Sudan has been ranked as a country with the lowest sanitation coverage among its population¹. Open defecation was already widespread² before the civil war that started in 2013 which led to over half of the population being displaced³, further worsening the sanitation situation. An assessment conducted by Concern in early 2016 showed a grim picture of access to WASH services, particularly low levels of use of latrines by the host communities and internally displaced people (IDPs). Concern Worldwide is supporting vulnerable communities in Kurkal and Koythey in Unity State with an innovative community-led total sanitation (CLTS) adapted approach. Koythey is mostly composed of households who were sheltered in informal shelters and abandoned buildings, and has a mixture of male and female headed households. Kurkal consists of a majority of female headed households who were allocated the site as part of the Government of South Sudan's commitment to resettled people who did not have individual land for settlement.

Issues

Collapsing latrines

The project area is characterised by dominant dark brown and black cotton soil that tends to collapse during the rainy season and it expands and contracts during the rainy and dry seasons, respectively. With these types of soils, the collapsing of latrines becomes cyclic which demotivates households from constructing new latrines. The size of the land available is also small and there is not enough space to construct new latrines each year.

Behaviour change

Most of the people who were displaced and now settled in the target area had never used a latrine for faecal matter disposal before. A majority of these people were pastoralist and used to practice open defecation. The majority of these people found the idea of constructing and using a latrine to be strange.

Flooding and flat terrain

The programme area is mostly flat floodplain and is located at an average elevation of around 400 metres. The elevation change within the area is not more than ± 3 metres.

Response

Following discussion at WASH Cluster level, a community-led total sanitation (CLTS) approach was promoted for the targeted communities in Kurkal and Koythey. Concern engaged with the communities and identified different designs to secure the long-term functioning of the latrines constructed. This resulted in three designs being piloted from 2018-2020:

- A. Partially subsidised CLTS with provision of a slab material, termite treated wood and sand bags for embankment to direct water away from the excavated latrines
- B. Lining of the pits using local materials (construction sticks)
- C. Tapered pits – to avoid collapsing of the pits

Concern's WASH team promoted the lining of latrines with local sticks. Household members were encouraged to collect the sticks from the bush and do their own lining of the pits, following a training from Concern in how to do so. Adhering to the 'community-led' aspect of CLTS, households were free to choose whether or not to collect sticks and construct the lining of their latrines. Despite Concern's recommendations, some households chose to construct latrines without lining the pits.



Figure 1: A completed pit under lining in Kurkal



Figure 2: A beneficiary lining her pit in Kurkal.



Figure 3: A lined pit with slab.



Figure 4: Pre-woven structure for lining.



Figure 5: A completed latrine constructed by community members with local materials.

Outcome

1. Out of the 252 latrines constructed in this period by the communities, half were constructed without any form of lining or tapered pits. All of this type of latrine collapsed during the following rainy season and were never in use, despite being supported with an embankment.
2. There was a challenge for the community in mastering the excavation design of the tapered pits, and despite Concern team's promotion and support, this design was not adopted frequently by households.
3. The 126 latrines that had been constructed using locally sourced sticks for lining were still functional and in use more than 6 months after the end of the 2020 rainy season when non-lined latrines had collapsed.

Lessons learned

The collapsing soils affected the uptake and sustainability of latrine construction and usage in the area. It was found that the design adopted was dependent on the time and resources available for a household to commit to the construction. Motivation also played a key role but it was not possible to identify why, among the households of the same socio-economic situation, some decided to go for the full design proposed, and some others not. In both targeted locations, several behaviour change triggers influenced the community members to construct the latrines. In particular, it was found that using messages focusing on the increased dignity from using a latrine had a much greater impact on the decision to construct and use latrines, than the traditional hygiene messaging stressing the positive effect of latrine for preventing disease outbreak. It is interesting to note that the strict respect of the CLTS principles led to the construction of some latrines that are not sustainable. This is likely the price to pay for giving communities the entire responsibility of the latrine construction process. For the next phase, Concern's team is hoping that the direct observation that pit-lined latrines are more robust will lead other households in the communities to ask Concern to support them to build those (including those who have seen their latrines collapsing during the rainy season).

References

- ¹UNICEF, 2019. South Sudan country office briefing note: <https://www.unicef.org/southsudan/media/2076/file/%20UNICEF-South-Sudan-WASH-Briefing-Note-Aug-2019.pdf>
- ² JMP, 2012. South Sudan statistics: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/ssd>
- ³ UNHCR, 2021. South Sudan website page: <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/south-sudan/>

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