

The Contribution of Religious Leaders toward Sustaining the Practice of Handwashing with Soap in Kamwenge District

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Background

While strategizing on how best to accelerate progress toward universal Handwashing with Soap (HWWS) in a planning forum with district and sub-county level stakeholders, Water For People suggested mapping out all stakeholders in the district with potential to contribute in this area. Unanimously, religious leaders were identified as one of those key stakeholders. They have a district wide presence with high likelihood to lead massive change in this area, given the respect they command and the big following they have at both community and institutional levels as founding bodies of schools and health care facilities.

The religious leaders, including the Head of Laity East Rwenzori Diocese (COU) and the Parish Priests of Kitagwenda and Kicwamba Catholic Parishes, were brought on board to join local and technical leadership in the Health Inspectorate in a HWWS behavioral change communication Training of Trainers (TOT) that Water For People organized. Personnel from the National Handwashing Initiative Secretariat served as a consultant and facilitator. The Chief Administrative Officer and the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) participated in the TOT. The TOT was the start of a journey that has brought religious leaders and clergy in as key WASH stakeholders in the district, HWWS ambassadors, and members of the District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee (DWSCC).



HWWS behavioral Change Communication TOT participants in a group discussion. Religious leaders, including Rev. Fr. Francis Xavier Kayondo (3rd from left), Parish Priest Kicwamba Catholic Parish (right), Fr. Aloysius (1st from left) and Canon Caleb, Head of Laity East Rwenzori Diocese, were evenly distributed in all groups.

Objective of Religious Leader Engagement

To improve scale of hygiene and sanitation coverage with a special focus on handwashing with soap.

Problem

Handwashing coverage has been low for Kamwenge despite progressive improvement in the last 3 years. The coverage of handwashing with soap in communities was 23.5% in 2015, 26% in 2016, and 28% in 2017 (MWE, Joint Sector Performance Reports 2015, 2016, 2017).

The Health Assistant in Buhanda Sub-county, Nicholas Tumwebaze, asserted that due to the people's failure to wash hands at critical times, including after visiting the latrine, before breastfeeding, and after cleaning baby's bottom, there has been common occurrences of diseases like diarrhea.

Scope of work

Engagement Meetings with the Clergy in their Respective Parishes

Water For People teams moved Parish to Parish for a one-on-one engagement with the Parish Priests (clergy). These Parish-based meetings resulted in the selection of zones and Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in which the campaigns by the clergy were started. This was done in four Catholic and five Anglican/COU Parishes.

Catholic Parishes reached include St. Charles Lwanga Kicwamba, Holy Trinity Kitagwenda, Nyakasura, and Bisozi. Anglican Parishes include Ntuuntu, Kibumbi, Nyakasenyi, Kicwamba, and Nkoma. For selected zones (each with 20-30 households), the Parish Priests mobilized members of the laity and community by sending circulars to the catechists and zone leaders and using monthly Parish bulletins.

On scheduled dates, the Parish Priests conducted home to home visits, sensitizing people about the advantages of good hygiene and sanitation, HWWS significance in reducing diarrheal diseases, and related savings. During the visits, the Parish Priests invited and moved with the Health Inspector and/or Health Assistant to explain to the laity the requirements and standards of an ideal home and demonstrate the installation of handwashing facility (tippy tap) with soap.

Hygiene and Sanitation Competitions

Inter-church, inter-zone, and Small Christian Community hygiene and sanitation competitions have been declared in the Catholic Parish Parishes of Kitagwenda and Kicwamba. Plans are underway to have the same in other Parishes where the approach is being implemented. The best performing zones will be rewarded with gifts such as bibles, altar linen, flower vessels, candle holders, and crucifixes. The competition approach was introduced to enable improvements in a wider area in shorter period of time.

Radio Talk Shows

Parish Priests of Kicwamba, Kitagwenda, and Ntuuntu Archdeaconry have participated in radio talk shows to mobilize the masses to participate in campaigns. The talk shows were done on Voice of Kamwenge (VOK) supported by Water For People. The talk shows were complemented

by the HWWS jingles to run in local language on VOK. Water For People adopted the jingles by the National Handwashing Initiative that were customized to the area.

HWWS Information Education Communication Materials

Water For People reproduced materials authored by the National Handwashing Initiative, including t-shirts, calendars, and posters, that were distributed in the catchment area of the campaigns, including churches and schools.



Small Christian Community leaders (3 women in the front row) posing with HWWS posters that they had just received for use in the campaigns in respective zones. In the background is Fr. Aloysius Tumwekwase, the Parish Priest, Kicwamba Catholic Parish, a key Champion of HWWS.

Launch of HWWS campaign by the Bishop

On Sunday, August 19th, 2018, the Rt. Rev. Bishop Robert Muhirwa Akiiki and Bishop Fort Portal at Holy Trinity Parish, Kitagwenda, officially launched the HWWS Campaign as a key component of the health thematic area under the Year of the Christian Family.

The Bishop challenged every household in the Diocese to embrace washing hands with soap before serving and eating food, after using the latrine, and after cleaning babies or changing diapers. He also emphasized the need for every household to have and use a latrine and all other requirements of an ideal home as one way of preventing diseases and reducing poverty arising from spending on treatment of related diseases. “Prevention is better than cure,” said Robert Muhirwa Akiiki.



The Bishop of Fort Portal Diocese, Rt. Reverend Robert K. Muhirwa Akiiki (4th from left) cutting a ribbon to officially launch the handwashing campaigns in one of the Parishes in Kamwenge. In front of him is a tippy tap on which he washed his hands to declare the campaigns started.

Achievements

Church Based Exemplary Leadership

In the Catholic Parishes of Kitagwenda, Kicwamba, Bisozi and Ntuuntu Archdeaconry, the Parish Priests are promoting exemplary leadership by ensuring every church structure leader has a handwashing facility and soap, as well as all requirements of hygiene and sanitation. Follow-up in the form of leader household visits by Parish Priests is ongoing in Kitagwenda Parish (232), Bisozi Parish (369), Kicwamba (187), Nyakasura Parish (212), and Ntuuntu Archdeaconry (45). Parish Priests are conducting home to home visits while working with area Health Assistants and Inspectors. During the visits, the status quo of the leaders is established, and demonstrations of tippy tap installation are done in areas where they are lacking. This has resulted into a mass of church-based leaders who are following up and promoting HWWS amongst the rest of the community members.

School Founding Body Based Meetings and Follow-up in Schools

Meetings with school management committee chairpersons, head teachers, and sanitation teachers were conducted with the lead of COU and Catholic Church Parish Priests. In the meetings, action plans were developed for ensuring the presence of HWWS facilities in COU and Catholic founded schools. Parish priests and school chaplains are currently moving school to school following up on implementation of HWWS action plans as pledged in the meetings. This was done because founding bodies have great capacity and potential to influence school management plans, including HWWS prioritization in terms of budget allocation and practice.



The Parish Priest Kitagwenda, Fr. Francis Xavier Kayondo (1st from right) during follow up in homes of Small Christian Community (SCC) leaders to ensure exemplary leadership. Washing hands on a tippy tap is SCC Chairperson in Kicheche Sub-county.



The Head and sanitation teachers of Church of Uganda founded public schools in a meeting with the Archdeacon of Ntuuntu Archdeaconry, Rev. Canon Jackson Rwabishari (front center) about HWWS in schools.

Continued Achievements

- Fort Portal Diocese has appreciated the approach implemented in Kamwenge and has encouraged other Parish Priests in the districts of Kabarole, Bundibugyo, Ntoroko, Kyegewa, and Kyenjojo to start campaigns in their respective Parishes to trigger action. Water For People was invited to share about the approach and experience from Kamwenge at the Diocesan Parish Priests meeting at the Diocesan Offices in Fort Portal on the 21st of September 2018. The meeting was attended by 28 Parish Priests, Director Caritas Fort Portal, and the Sister coordinating the Diocesan Health Office. The Sister pledged to make a practical learning visit to Parishes in Kamwenge to adopt activities of the Health Office. At the meeting, the clergy who have implemented the handwashing campaign shared the experience with their colleagues from other parishes and districts.
- A model is emerging from this approach, including examples in Rwebinyonyi, Katehe, and Kicwamba South in Kicwamba Parish in Ntara Sub-county, which now have 100% HWWS at the household level. These will serve as learning areas where other stakeholders and religious leaders can borrow lessons.
- Exemplary leaders in homes have emerged from the context of church. These are a new addition to the conventional Health Inspectorate teams (Village Health Teams and Health Assistants and Inspectors) that have been promoting HWWS.
- National-level stakeholders have come to appreciate the approach of religious leaders in HWWS campaigns. The Ministry of Water and Environment Team, UNICEF, and Suraya (a development partner in HWWS) have visited the program area to learn more about the approach. They visited model villages with total HWWS and interacted with District Officials, Water For People teams, and the Parish Priest of Kicwamba. Additionally, Kamwenge District hosted the Global Handwashing Day (GHD) celebration for year 2018 at Kicwamba Catholic Parish, and the Fort Portal Diocese Bishop was recognized as a chief HWWS ambassador for the day. Religious leaders unanimously participated in the ceremonies of the GHD consequent of their active role in the HWWS campaigns.



Religious Leaders (front left) and Guest of Honour, State Minister for Water, Hon. Ronald Kibule (4th from right) inspecting the exhibition stall of Kamwenge Hand Pump Mechanic Association at the GHD celebration.

Drivers of success

- Health Inspectorate support and responsiveness to the approach: The Health Assistant and Health Inspector support the clergy during demonstrations of installation handwashing facilities, as well as sensitization on the use of soap and proper handwashing. “As a Health Inspectorate staff, I appreciate the efforts of clergy in saving lives through the disease preventive approach of preaching good sanitation and hygiene with much emphasis on handwashing with soap alongside the gospel,” said Nicholas Tumwebaze, Health Assistant, Buhanda Sub-county. He added that with most people believing in religious leaders, the approach has led to faster change in response to HWWS.
- Existing church structures: The church has a well-established structural framework, within which it was easy to integrate HWWS campaigns at different levels and amongst different groups, including women and children.
- The education policy that recognizes the role of founding bodies in schools: This has enabled response from schools to the Parish Priests’ call on school management to ensure HWWS in schools.
- The significant influence and respect commanded by the clergy amongst the community.
- Admission of religious leaders into the DWSCC by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). This assured the clergy of formal recognition of their work in WASH.
- Capacity-building: Clergy participation in the HWWS behavioral change campaign.
- TOT: Including religious leaders in Water For People’s annual reflection with stakeholders and the Everyone Forever model which seeks to tap into every stakeholder’s potential to contribute to reaching Everyone with WASH services.

Challenges and how they were addressed

There are different geographical structures, as churches are categorized in zones, Small Christian Communities, and church centres, compared to government structures that range from villages, sub-counties, and districts. This will require harmonization in reporting; the names of zones will be changed to those within structure of administrative units of government.

Lessons Learnt & Best Practices

- Religious leaders are highly respected by communities. Religious leaders command respect and have a wide scope of audience and influence, thus the ability to lead to fast results in areas of WASH, and especially HWWS.
- Religious leaders command authority in education institutions and can be good agents of change, as most schools in Uganda operate on the foundation of a certain religion.
- Stakeholder identification should be an ongoing process for any program or issue. Religious leaders were brought on board in WASH and HWWS campaigns long after the start of Everyone Forever model in Kamwenge, and they have added a lot of value in HWWS.

Recommendations & Next Steps

- Establishment of formal relationship between Water For People and religious leaders or institutions.
- Supporting learning events and documentation that can lead to scale up of the approach to other districts in the region, as well as in the entire WASH sector at National level.