

Radio Messages and WASH Behavior Change in Rwanda

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INTRODUCTION

Achieving positive change in behaviors toward safe water usage and improved hygiene and sanitation practices requires continued investment and use of Behavior Change Communication (BCC). BCC is a process that motivates people to adopt and sustain healthy behaviors and lifestyles. This overarching process involves understanding the target community, defining key messages and channels, engaging communities through a strong, strategic participatory approach, implementation of targeted interventions, and regular monitoring as well as impact assessment. BCC is one of the most essential components of influencing behavior change. When planned well, BCC can be a very effective intervention to bring appropriate changes in behavior, especially among populations with high risk behavior.

One of the channels used to deliver behavior change messages to the public is the use of mass media, including radio, TV, and print media. These 'traditional' media have the power to bring messages to thousands, if not millions, of people simultaneously. In the experience of Water For People Rwanda's team, radio messages have a positive impact on influencing water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) behavior change. In the districts of Gicumbi and Rulindo, Water For People has delivered targeted WASH messages through a local radio station, Ishingiro Community Radio.

METHODOLOGY

In 2017, the Water For People Rwanda team conducted a household survey in both districts to assess the impact of the deployed behavior change strategies. The assessment generated primary data showing a picture of the effectiveness of the strategies, including the use of targeted radio messages. A literature review of similar studies from other parts of the world was used to generate secondary data. The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether radio messages have any impact in influencing human behavior related to WASH practices.

REACHING COMMUNITIES THROUGH ISHINGIRO RADIO

In mid-2016, Water For People and Ishingiro Community Radio agreed to a partnership which sought to use radio messages to encourage communities in Rulindo and Gicumbi Districts to adopt proper WASH practices, such as using safe water, handwashing, building and using improved toilets, and using tip tap (kandagira ukarabe) tools, among others. The messages were delivered through targeted live and pre-recorded radio programs, news broadcasts, mini-drama series, and adverts.

RESULTS

Water For People produced a full report on the results of this analysis, "Report on Impact Assessment of Hygiene Promotion Strategies in Rulindo and Gicumbi Districts" (Water For People, 2017). The report gives insight into the perceived impact of Ishingiro Radio messages on hygiene behavior change. A comparative approach was also undertaken with reports submitted by the Radio Station.

The survey found that:

- 25% of the population in the 17 sectors surveyed in Rulindo and Gicumbi Districts listen to Radio Ishingiro.
- 23.6% of all survey respondents said that they benefit from WASH messages broadcasted through Ishingiro Radio, and the radio is an effective tool to communicate radio messages.
- 94.7% said they have the knowledge on hygiene concepts and could tell the critical times of handwashing.
- Only 32.9% had means of handwashing using either tip taps, basins, jags, etc.

SITUATION ELSEWHERE

To come to an objective conclusion, Water For People explored the global context of mass media and behavior change. We looked at studies conducted in other parts of the world aimed at establishing links between radio messages and WASH behavior change.

It is important to note that research shows that even in this era seemingly dominated by internet and digital media, radio remains a key source of information across the world. This becomes even more true in low and middle-income countries where households may rely entirely on radio to get news and information. According to UNESCO, 75% of households in developing countries have access to a radio (UNESCO, 2013). This means that radio remains an influential way to spread important messages to the population.

In other surveys, UNESCO found out that:

- AM/FM radio accounts for 86% of the total time adults aged 25-54 spend listening to three main audio platforms. Adults listen to eight times more AM/FM radio than satellite radio and 17 times more than internet audio streaming.
- AM/FM radio is heard by a variety of decision influencers, with 43% of respondents aged 25 to 54 saying they listen with their children; 38 % listen with their spouse or partner.
- In Tanzania, a survey found out that 83% of Tanzanians get news and information from radio, making it the leader of both media and non-media sources.

CONCLUSION

Radio remains the widest source of information for many people across the world. Especially in low and middle-income countries, radio remains a critical tool to spread communication. In Gicumbi and Rulindo Districts, where Water For People has been broadcasting targeted WASH messages to the population, it is clear that radio remains an influential source of information. However, the limited coverage and audience for Ishingiro Radio limits the possibility of impacting behavior change.

Radio has the power to influence listeners and encourage them to adopt desired behaviors if messages are well crafted and designed to influence the population. In Gicumbi and Rulindo, the radio is effective in creating awareness about proper hygiene and sanitation practices. However, changing an individual's or a community's behavior to embrace proper practices is not an easy task. In Gicumbi and Rulindo, the pace at which the audience translates the pool of knowledge into action remains slow. To see results, there is a need to use comprehensive approaches, a combination of channels, and, of course, continued interventions and years of repetition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To maximize impact, there is a need to re-design the radio broadcasts to make them more participatory and appealing to the public. Also, there is a need for the radio to attract more audiences to the WASH programs, such as the introduction of more call-in programs, live competitions, hosting exemplary community members in the studios to talk about their experiences, and more on-field broadcasts with communities. Water For People shall continue to design high-impact messages for the audiences and packaging them in a way that drives the listeners to take more action toward proper improved water and sanitation practices.

REFERENCES

UNESCO, 2013. *Statistics on Radio*. Accessible at <https://bit.ly/1wJad7L>.

Water For People Rwanda, 2017. *Impact Assessment of Hygiene Promotion Strategies in Rulindo and Gicumbi Districts*.