

Title: Accelerating knowledge sharing and capacity building through the using of faith groups

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Theme: Capacity to accelerate knowledge-sharing and commitment among individuals and organizations, across civil society. How do we share our knowledge, and how can we raise more ownership and responsibility about water matters among our staff, our families, society, and current and future generations?

Key words Faith Groups, sensitisation, knowledge sharing, Water and Sanitation, behaviour change

Abstract

Introduction

Faith Groups are among the oldest and most wide-spread networks in our societies. Faith leaders are, in the local context, often considered to be more reliable than the government- or other officials. Faith Groups can thus be powerful messengers to reach rural communities with knowledge on WASH practices and options to improve their livelihoods in terms of access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene technologies and practices. Through the extensive network of Faith Groups, capacity building can be taken up into the furthers and smallest veins of societies.

To explore the possibilities of using Faith Groups the CCAP SMART Centre in Mzuzu, Malawi, has since 2017 piloted a program called Faith and Water. The program is rolled out together with the 'Lay-Training' department of the Synod of Livingstonia of the Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP). This paper presents the results achieved through the trainings and explores ways to scale up the efforts to other Faith Groups, other geographical areas and countries.

Set-up / Methodology

The CCAP SMART Centre and the Lay-Leadership Department combine their skills and resources to set-up meetings for Faith and Water Trainings. After the regular meeting with the church leaders the SMART Centre team trains the church leaders to become trainers in water and sanitation, within their own churches and communities. The approach is to relate to the Bible, which also has many hygiene and sanitation regulations meant to ensure a healthy life. It is made clear that church leaders can also teach their church and community members about the importance of hygiene and clean water. Furthermore, the training consists of many practical examples with locally available materials which can be used to explain good practices, discussions and the design of a ten-step-plan to improve the situations in the communities the coming half year. Lastly a number of low-cost technologies such as a water filter is shown to provide examples that are within reach of the trainers.

Results so far

The Faith and Water program has lead to an increased focus on water and sanitation practices within the churches, and within the households of church members. Case studies gathered during return visits to the groups have shown households investing in improved water supply through the purchase of a water filter or the improvement of a well near their homes. Secondly, the visits as part of the Faith and Water program were a trigger to communities to take action in, at times, restoring their existing supply of water, often a broken down handpump. Practitioners trained through the SMART Centre were able to assist the communities in maintaining boreholes and also churches have send

some of their members to the SMART Centre for training and capacity building in specific technical skills.

Feedback from the first round of trainings have led to some changes in the approach including aiming at a better gender balance in the group through the inclusion of female natural leaders besides the (often) male church leaders as well as including (local) government staff such as HSAs (health surveillance assistance) to ensure the local follow-up and to provide the church members with a contact person within their area.

The results of the pilot have been promising and have shown the use of Faith Groups as an powerful and effective strategy to reach (rural) communities with both a message of behaviour change related to WASH as well as making them familiar with technical solutions to improve their access to WASH that are within reach of their budget and locally available.