

Sustaining impact, halting transmission: Focus on F&E

Eliminating Trachoma: Accelerating Towards 2020

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Importance of F&E interventions

Trachoma thrives in rural and marginalized populations, where there are a lack of sustainable, adequate and affordable water supplies and sanitation services¹. These areas often suffer the burden of multiple neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) at any given time.

Ensuring access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) can decrease the number of people living in conditions favourable to the transmission of diseases and requiring treatment against them as well as easing the lives of those already impaired².

WASH is thought to be essential for the prevention of trachoma, and for sustaining the impact of treatment interventions towards elimination goals³. Although this has been enshrined within the SAFE strategy (Surgery, Antibiotics, Facial cleanliness and Environmental improvements), progress on the Facial cleanliness and Environmental improvement components of the strategy remains a challenge.

This is perhaps not surprising, since provision of sustainable WASH services requires substantial investment in infrastructure as well as behaviour change initiatives – both challenging aspects for disease control programmes. This means that partnership and close collaboration with organisations and government agencies working in water and sanitation, education and health promotion services is essential.

Efforts by trachoma partners are focused on the co-benefits of enhanced collaboration, and by finding practical approaches to coordination and integration of WASH and trachoma programmes. Recent experience shows that such collaboration can be achieved.

Coordinated planning with WASH services

In countries like Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, planning for F and E interventions has been based on detailed situational analyses conducted jointly by trachoma and WASH stakeholders⁴. This subsequently led to broadening of existing sanitation plans to allow for a focus on facial cleanliness in Chad, Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda⁵.

In Zambia and Ethiopia, the joint planning process enabled development of innovative approaches to address the challenges of hygiene behaviour change⁶. This new approach to collaboration helps lay the foundation for partnership and long-term sustainability.

In Malawi and Uganda, new partnerships with WASH organisations have been developed through the trachoma programme, to lead the design and delivery of integrated sanitation and hygiene promotion⁷.

In Zambia, the collaboration initiated by the trachoma programme is already leading to sharing of district-level water and sanitation data to enable targeted services to communities most at risk of disease. While in several other countries, the programme has included a joint monitoring and evaluation framework through which the effect of F and E interventions is assessed⁸.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



“It is time to build on the momentum in the health and development community to reinforce joint WASH and NTD actions to accelerate progress towards control, elimination and eradication of NTDs.”

Maria Neira and Dirk Engels, WHO



Nepal, children face washing

Leadership

Ultimately, ownership and leadership by national programmes is a fundamental element of successful development and disease control.

Such leadership has been demonstrated in Sudan, where disease mapping at the time revealed that more than half of the country's 151 districts required S and/or A,F,E interventions, thereby requiring a stronger focus on limiting transmission⁹. Consequently, the National Trachoma Programme is now prioritising efforts to form a broader partnership with WASH and education agencies.

In immediate terms, collaboration between WASH and trachoma stakeholders is likely to be more cost effective and efficient at achieving programme objectives. In the long term, it is crucial for the sustained impact of S and A efforts and will help direct WASH investment to those most in need¹⁰ – the same communities most likely to be affected by NTDs such as trachoma.

Ultimately, it can make a lasting impact towards the achievement of the SDGs - of strengthening health systems, reducing poverty and securing equitable human development.

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“As a result of better communication between the WASH and trachoma communities, we’re seeing more joint planning at the national level...it seems a small thing but it’s huge and it’s what’s needed to make a sustained impact.”

Yael Velleman, Senior Policy Analyst, WaterAid

¹ World Health Organization. (2015) Water sanitation and hygiene for accelerating and sustaining progress on neglected tropical diseases: A global strategy 2015-2020. Geneva: World Health Organization. http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/wash-and-ntd-strategy/en/

² World Health Organization. (2015) Third WHO report on neglected tropical diseases: "Investing to overcome the global impact of neglected tropical diseases". Geneva: World Health Organization. http://www.who.int/neglected_diseases/9789241564861/en/. P.62

³ World Health Organization. (2016). Trachoma. [online] Available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs382/en/>.

⁴ ICTC (2014) TrachomaSAFE Proven Strategies for Trachoma Prevention. <http://trachomasafe.org/>. In conversation with Geordie Woods, Sightsavers, 16 April 2016.

⁵ ICTC (2014) TrachomaSAFE Proven Strategies for Trachoma Prevention. <http://trachomasafe.org/>. In a conversation with Geordie Woods, Sightsavers, 16 April 2016.

⁶ ICTC (2014) TrachomaSAFE Proven Strategies for Trachoma Prevention. <http://trachomasafe.org/>. In a conversation with Geordie Woods, Sightsavers, 16 April 2016.

⁷ ICTC (2014) TrachomaSAFE Proven Strategies for Trachoma Prevention. <http://trachomasafe.org/>. In a conversation with Geordie Woods, Sightsavers, 16 April 2016.

⁸ ICTC (2014) TrachomaSAFE Proven Strategies for Trachoma Prevention. <http://trachomasafe.org/>. In a conversation with Geordie Woods, Sightsavers, 16 April 2016.

⁹ Alliance for GET2020 Database.

¹⁰ World Health Organization. (2015) Water sanitation and hygiene for accelerating and sustaining progress on neglected tropical diseases: A global strategy 2015-2020. Geneva: World Health Organization. http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/wash-and-ntd-strategy/en/