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Healthy village: integrated WASH and nutrition sustainability for child health

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PUBLISHER

WEDC, Loughborough University

VERSION

VoR (Version of Record)

LICENCE

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REPOSITORY RECORD

van der Wilt, Suzan, and Mohammed Irfan. 2021. "Healthy Village: Integrated WASH and Nutrition Sustainability for Child Health". Loughborough University. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/16866856.v1>.

42nd WEDC International Conference

ONLINE: 13 – 15 September, 2021

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

Healthy Village: Integrated WASH & nutrition sustainably for child health

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The Netherlands

REFERENCE NO. 3240

The Healthy Village approach to undernutrition

We aim to give children under five a healthy start in life: reducing stunting and risk of preventable disease through our innovative Healthy Village approach. This Espresso presentation will share a video from Bangladesh that explains the approach, a shortened version of the 7+ minute video mentioned in the references.

About the Healthy Village approach and impact reached to date

Max Foundation has developed a flagship Healthy Village approach in marginalized, low-income communities of south coastal Bangladesh, in our integrated WASH & Nutrition (Healthy Village) programme reaching 1.1 million people by 2021 (full coverage of 62 rural municipalities) with local partners and embedded in local government institutions. We aim to mainstream this approach in Bangladesh and replicate it elsewhere. In 2020 we launched a new programme with Plan International and the Government of Ethiopia adapting this approach to Ethiopia which will reach 400,000 people in 4 districts by 2024. The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in each country has been the lead donor, also supported by other contributions (e.g. private foundations) and local investments.

Mobilizing communities, caregivers, entrepreneurs and local government around the goal: child health

The Max Healthy Village approach mobilizes the entire community towards lasting sanitation, hygiene and nutrition behaviour change, because healthy children grow up in healthy communities.

We do this by engaging households, entrepreneurs and local government, and we make sure it lasts by empowering them to continue beyond the end of the programme.

To create a living environment for children to grow up healthy, we target key WASH, nutrition and essential care behaviours. This means: facilitating access to and use of a nutritious and diverse diet; improved sanitation; safe drinking water; water for food production and hygiene practices and products (including baby WASH). We raise awareness to create demand for quality products and services to make healthy behaviours possible, such as handwashing devices by the latrine and dining area (to make handwashing at the five critical times easier), or improved care for mothers and children up to age five.

The Healthy village approach uses growth monitoring (GMP) data of children under five to trigger this behaviour change: the worry of the caregivers that their child will not grow up healthy ignites a desire for change. Child measurement in courtyard sessions with peers allows for peer to peer learning on what to do to improve child health.

Another key element is a strong local market. We engage local entrepreneurs in the sale of hygiene, water, sanitation and nutrition products and services, and train them in marketing. The entrepreneurs, in turn, drive demand amongst the community. This works, and the proof is in the local leverage we mobilize: for every euro we spend on improved sanitation hardware and supporting related services, communities and local government in Bangladesh invest almost six.

Local government supports and monitors the villages' progress, and officially declare villages 'Healthy' once they meet and maintain (for one year) key indicators including handwashing at the five critical times with soap, use of hygienic latrines, regular child growth monitoring, pre- and post-natal care for women, menstrual hygiene, and households meeting minimum dietary needs (quantity and diversity), especially for pregnant and lactating women, and children under five. The Healthy Village designation not only mobilizes the community to change, but serves to inspire other communities. By the end of the programme, ownership is migrated to the local community, entrepreneurs and government, to enable lasting change at scale.

Pathway to sustainability: migrating ownership to local stakeholders

This is key to our approach, which follows a pathway to post-project sustainability, in five phases from inception (1) to ignition of key community stakeholders and parents (2), to graduation (3), to officially being designated as a Healthy Village by local authorities (4), and finally to migration of ownership to those stakeholders by the end of the project (5). A more elaborate explanation of these 5 steps can be found in the upload section, under 'Pathway to Sustainability'.

While the focus is on WASH and nutrition, many programme elements link to maternal and child health, such as exclusive and complementary breastfeeding and ensuring ante- and post-natal care for mothers. Antenatal care is valued as one of the most important components during pregnancy, and reduces the chances of maternal and neonatal mortality. After a child is born, the Programme supports post-natal visits that facilitate healthy breastfeeding practices, monitor the new-born's growth and overall health status, and refer the mother and baby for specialized care if necessary: promoting medical attention for infants and children in cases of severe undernutrition.

Conclusions: What are the unique selling points (USPs) of the Healthy Village approach?

- Focus on the outcome: child health, rather than a specific sector intervention (nutrition, WASH, sexual and reproductive health) and integrating key elements needed to achieve it.
- The Healthy Village approach aims to break sector silos of food and nutrition security, WASH, and care, and to tackle stunting and under-five child health from more than one angle.
- Migration of ownership to local stakeholders over the course of the programme, along a five-phase pathway to sustainability, ensures continuity.

The 'Healthy Village' process is community-led and endorsed by (local) government: we promote change via local 'champions' –community leaders, WASH committees, volunteers, entrepreneurs.

The official designation and sign in the village incentivizes the community and local government to achieve and maintain that status.

Entrepreneurs and sales agents play a crucial role to drive demand for affordable, quality nutrition, sanitation and hygiene products and services - and then meet that demand with quality supply.

References

<https://youtu.be/kUTm5FfRC4> Max Foundation's Healthy Village video. A 5-minute version will be created and used for this Espresso presentation.

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