

The Safe Water System Project: Social Marketing and Community Mobilization in Kenya

Background

An estimated 884 million people worldwide lack access to an improved water source. Hundreds of millions more drink contaminated water from improved sources because of unsafe water treatment and distribution systems and unsafe water storage and handling practices. Every year, there are approximately 2.5 billion cases of diarrhea, killing an estimated 1.3 million young children. It is estimated that 88% of these diarrheal deaths are the result of unsafe water, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygiene. The Safe Water System (SWS) is a water quality intervention proven to reduce diarrheal disease incidence in users by 22-84%. The SWS includes: 1) water treatment with chlorine solution at the point-of-use; 2) storage of water in a safe container; and, 3) behavior change communication.

The Safe Water System in Kenya

The SWS project in Kenya began in 2000 with a CARE/Kenya pilot project in Nyanza Province. Results from this project showed a 56% reduction of diarrheal disease risk in rural communities. Based on this successful pilot project, PSI/Kenya began marketing a SWS product, a bottle of sodium hypochlorite solution branded as 'WaterGuard,' in May 2003. Since the start of the program, approximately 10 billion liters of water have been treated with WaterGuard. The WaterGuard product and distribution is cost-recovery, with marketing costs subsidized by PSI internal funding. In addition to WaterGuard, PSI/Kenya markets PUR and Aquatabs. Since 2006, enough PUR has been sold to treat over 20 million liters of water and since 2009, enough Aquatabs have been sold to treat approximately 12 million liters of water.



PSI/Kenya Promotional Advertising

The locally-produced WaterGuard product is widely available in Kenya, with PSI ensuring quality, supply, and continuous distribution of the product. This allows other organizations to focus on community mobilization, behavior change communications, and other product adoption techniques. A variety of organizations are working to increase adoption of WaterGuard at the household level. One example is local women's community groups in Nyanza Province who collaborate with CDC/Kenya, CARE training, and PSI health products to receive micro-finance loans to purchase stocks of health products, including WaterGuard, to sell in their rural communities. The Kenya Ministry of Health supports the use of WaterGuard, and has collaborated with CARE/Kenya and CDC to promote WaterGuard and safe storage containers in hospitals. A curriculum to train nurses to teach patients about WaterGuard and hand hygiene has been implemented. CARE has also introduced the SWS and hand hygiene education into 45 schools with support from Coca-Cola/East Africa, and the program is being further expanded with multiple other donors.

These linked programs have resulted in successful behavior change. An evaluation in 2004 showed that 20% of very poor, rural households served by SWAK had detectable chlorine residuals in water stored in the home. An evaluation of the nursing intervention demonstrated that two weeks after nurses recommended the use of WaterGuard to clinic patients, 67% of patients purchased WaterGuard and had chlorine residual present in the drinking water stored in their homes on an unannounced visit by evaluators. A recent evaluation has shown that utilization rates among counseled patients remain at over 60% one year later.

The CDC/PSI Kenya project is a successful social marketing intervention, creating demand for a product and making it widely available through the commercial sector. In addition, easy access to the product and communications tools means that local NGOs can readily incorporate WaterGuard into their own programming. As this rural distribution model expands, it offers an ideal location for future research on rural public health programming and is an example of a successful, at-scale public health intervention.



A rural midwife promotes the product and uses it herself.

For more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/safewater