

White Paper

Bringing Hygiene to 330 Million Africans by 2015





1. Health and Hygiene in Africa: How big is the challenge?

1.1 Hygiene related health conditions and consequences

Despite rapid economic growth in some countries, and the major efforts that are being made to improve the welfare of its 840 million people (12% of the world's population), the number of African children dying each year remains unacceptably high. For every six children born, one dies before reaching his or her fifth birthday in sub-Saharan Africa – the highest rate of any continent, and the area showing least improvement in the last few decades (Unicef). The causes of these deaths are almost all preventable. Two of the biggest killers are diarrhoeal disease, which kills 400,000 African children every year⁽¹⁾ and acute respiratory infections, which kills double that number⁽²⁾. These diseases are passed from person to person and can be prevented.

Another important cause of death in African children is under-nutrition. One quarter of sub-Saharan African children are either moderately or severely underweight (Unicef). Frequent bouts of diarrhoea and other transmissible infections contribute even more to a vicious cycle of poor health and poor child growth.

In addition, around the world, some four million children die each year within their first 28 days of life – the newborn (neo-natal) period. The highest rates for both neonatal deaths and stillbirths are also greatest in sub-Saharan Africa. This means that about 1.5 million neo-natal deaths occur in Africa (Unicef).

1.2 The role of hygiene and improved health potential of handwashing with soap

Improved hygiene could contribute to reducing deaths from diarrhoea, respiratory tract infections, neonatal infections and also malnutrition. Studies suggest that handwashing with soap can reduce the rate of diarrhoea infections by 42%⁽³⁾ and respiratory infections by 25%⁽⁴⁾. One study in Nepal suggests that handwashing with soap by carers could reduce neonatal mortality by 41%⁽⁵⁾. Handwashing is also an important means for the prevention of the ravages of pandemic 'flu, such as the current epidemic of swine 'flu⁽⁶⁾.

Sadly, however, far too few people in Africa Kenya/ Uganda and Ghana data. wash their hands properly. Rates for handwashing with soap after defecation range from 30% in Kenya, to 15% in Tanzania and Uganda, to only 3% in Ghana; rates before handling food are even lower^(7,8).

It follows, therefore, that if everyone in Africa washed their hands with soap regularly it would prevent a significant proportion of the infectious disease, sickness and death experienced by children and their families in Africa today.

2. What will it take to achieve mass behaviour change in Africa?

2.1 Joint action by all actors in society

Changing this situation requires a massive effort. It is not easy to change long held habits that are deeply entrenched in the routines of daily life. There is a need for all sections of society to work together – the private sector, public sector health authorities and civil societies. There is a need for more resources to be invested from the public sector and for universal handwashing with soap to be placed higher up their agenda. Civil agencies and NGOs need to join forces to support this effort and to take it to those who need it the most.

Schools have an important role to play in establishing the handwashing habit early in life. International agencies and academics now have a lot of experience of promoting handwashing and know what works and what doesn't. Soap companies have achieved mass distribution (97% of households in Africa have access to soap) and the reach to have a steady and sustainable impact on everyday handwashing behaviours. All the players need to pool their efforts.



2.2 Motivation not education

There is a fundamental difference between claimed and actual handwashing behaviour. When asked, they say that they do wash their hands with soap, on the whole. However, direct observation shows that what people claim to do and what they actually do is not always the same.

This highlights that the issue is not only about educating people about germs as it is about motivating people to want to wash their hands. Fear of diseases only works in the context of epidemics (i.e. cholera) or pandemics (i.e. swine flu) and as soon as the risks are decreased the compliance with desired behaviour falls. Therefore what is needed is a comprehensive approach where the target population is regularly reminded and triggered to act on the handwashing behaviours.

3. Lifebuoy in Africa

The Lifebuoy brand was originally launched in 1894 in the United Kingdom when it had a significant impact on public health in Victorian Britain, then ravaged by recurrent cholera outbreaks. It was launched in Africa in 1910 and today is present in East, West and Southern Africa. The brand has refined its social mission over the years and today its aim is to make five billion people feel safe and secure through the active hand washing with soap over the next five years

Lifebuoy will be conducting socially driven activities with an emphasis on personal hygiene in most places where we do business. These will involve;

1). Instilling good handwash habits through Lifebuoy's handwashing promotion programs:

Lifebuoy's primary objective is to make hand washing a joint mother and child experience by running personal hygiene programmes that directly impact the people who buy and use our soap. Similar initiatives have been run in India with rural hygiene programmes which have reached over 130 million people in 50,000 villages over the past five years. The plan for Africa will involve reaching out to schools, clinics and women groups in countries where we will have Lifebuoy – namely South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Malawi, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Tanzania and Nigeria, with the intention to achieve hygiene behaviour change in the majority of the 330m consumers spread across these countries by 2015.

2). Public advocacy

Lifebuoy uses its power of promotion to advocate on behalf of hand washing. At the heart of this activity has been the creation of the **Global hand washing day**, an annual event on the 15th of October. Unilever through its Lifebuoy brand has been key instigators of this initiative and now the celebration of the day with local partners is an important part of the marketing plan in each of the countries we will be operating in. In 2009 alone, Lifebuoy with its partners held successful events that reached out to more than 13,000 school going children in Kenya and Uganda alone.

3). Skill-sharing

Thirdly we believe that sharing our skills and capabilities is an excellent way to build strategic alliances and develop better campaigns for hand washing. To this end, we created a training course called **'In Safe Hands'**, through which managers from the Lifebuoy brand and Unilever Marketing Academy pass on their communication skills and behaviour change techniques to public health professionals, to help them develop communication campaigns. So far the support in Africa has been extended to Eastern Africa mainly for the establishment of a regional campaign in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.



4. Lifebuoy's future commitment to hygiene improvement in Africa

4.1 The Lifebuoy Way

In 2009 Lifebuoy developed a new approach to hygiene behaviour change after commissioning one of the largest independent studies assessing the effect of soap usage on diseases such as diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections. The study – which involved 2000 families in poorer areas of Mumbai – showed that using Lifebuoy soap at five key moments during the day (soap usage before eating), significantly reduced the number of episodes of diarrhoea by 25%, acute respiratory infections by 15% and eye infections by 46%. Due to reduction in the number of episodes of disease there was a 40% increase in school attendance amongst children in the 1st year of school. This has given Lifebuoy greater confidence in its ability to affect hygiene behaviours and the learnings from this study are being incorporated into a mass scale activity that will start to be deployed in 2011.

4.2 One billion people by 2015

Lifebuoy is committed to making a measurable difference to the challenges set out in this paper. It believes it is the soap brand that is best placed to be part of the solution in Africa, as it provides one of the cheapest hand washes available, costing just Ksh 0.16 Euros per hand wash and will be made available to the majority of the 330m consumers who make up the lowest socio-economic group. It is with this twin capability in mind that Lifebuoy has developed a new initiative with the bold ambition of changing the behaviour of no fewer than 1 billion people in the next three years – and the most important mortality reduction will come from the African continent where the need is greatest.

The programme will reach both rural and urban communities and will encourage people to wash their hands with soap on key hygiene occasions, including before having food and after defecation. The programme contains a number of different components with various channels that will help in reaching our target audience with the intensity needed to bring about behaviour change. Our programme includes a school programme, ways to reach mothers, the use of digital world (300 million people use mobiles in Africa and fastly getting to a penetration of 30%), mass media and also use of our packaging to pass hygiene messages. It will be implemented from 2011 onwards.

4.3 Biggest ever commitment

This mass scale behaviour change programme – with significant resources allocated for its deployment – represents the biggest ever commitment by a brand to promote good hygiene habits to people in the lowest socio economic groups worldwide. With significant investment being put behind Lifebuoy in Africa from 2010 onwards, we are cautiously confident this new programme will create the changes needed to produce a measurable improvement to the health of the majority of Africans. This is a call to action to make this vision real for 1 billion people.



References:

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