Involving Men in Handwashing Behavior Change Interventions in Senegal

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INTRODUCTION

Launched in December 2006, the Water and Sanitation Program (WSP)'s Global Scaling Up Handwashing Project has been implemented by local and national governments in Peru, Senegal, Tanzania, and Vietnam, with technical support from WSP. The target population for the project in Senegal includes an estimated 1.5 million women, caretakers, and children living in eighty localities in the regions of Dakar, Diourbel, Fatick, Kaolack, Louga, Thiès, Ziguinchor, and Saint-Louis.

A central component of the handwashing project is the planning and implementation of an integrated communications program that includes mass media at national and local levels and community promotional events—led by private firms skilled in experiential marketing and advertising. In addition, interpersonal communications at the household level is handled by fieldworkers (called relays in Senegal) who have previously worked on other public health issues such as family planning, nutrition, and HIV/AIDS prevention. The main responsibility of the relays is to reach out to the households and convince mothers to set up designated areas for handwashing (i.e., handwashing stations) to provide convenient access to soap and water when and where needed.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Early on in project planning, women were identified as the target audience because of their central role in caring for the family—especially children—and because women’s hygiene behaviors are strongly correlated to reducing or transmitting fecal contamination within the household.

However, in Senegal, men are typically heads of household, and in this role they exert influence on many levels. For example, when relays initiate a request to make a household visit, their point of contact is the male head of household. Men also allocate financial resources to purchase household items such as soap, a handwashing station, or

Key findings

- In Senegal, men are typically heads of household. In this role, they act as gatekeeper, protector, and role model, exerting influence over household activities such as finances, social interactions, and behaviors.
- Senegalese men have expressed frustration at not being included in handwashing promotion discussions. Thus, both men and women should be targeted in handwashing behavior change promotions.
- Preliminary observations indicate that men are interested in handwashing promotion because of its potential impact on their children’s health and well being.
dispenser. Indeed, in a 2009 survey of Senegalese women, nearly half of those surveyed (48 percent) indicated that men provide soap for the household.2

Operating within this social context, relays reported that, during many household visits, men expressed frustration at not being included in the handwashing promotion discussion. In other instances, men took action to help facilitate the discussion:

One day I came in a polygammist’s household. It was difficult to get all the women’s attention at the same time. The wives were not keen to sit together. When the husband heard my introduction, he joined us and required all women to stop their occupations and attend the discussion. Our handwashing messages were reinforced by him and he committed himself to provide the necessary products for handwashing and to monitor the family members’ behavior.

—Relay report from a household visit in a suburb of Dakar

Thus, while the Global Scaling Up Handwashing Project had initially focused on Senegalese women as the target audience for mass media, direct consumer contact, and interpersonal communications, an emerging lesson was that the project team needed to consider the role of Senegalese men as heads of household, with the potential for adding men as a target audience for project implementation.

**ACTION**

The project team organized a half-day learning event in December 2009, in Dakar, to validate the hypothesis regarding the role of men and to formulate strategies to more effectively involve men. The event was attended by 25 people from ten local organizations responsible for supervising the relays. Using an Emergent Learning Map3, participants addressed the following questions:

a. What did you learn about the importance of involving men in handwashing promotion and what makes you believe this?

b. Based on your experience, what are the best strategies to involve men in handwashing promotion? Why do you recommend these strategies?

c. Within your current programs, what are the opportunities to integrate the strategies you propose?

**KEY LEARNINGS**

The Dakar event produced several key learnings:

- As heads of household, Senegalese men play several key roles. Based on field observations and discussion, three key roles were identified—gatekeepers, protectors, and role models—and ways to leverage these roles were discussed (Figure 1).
- In these roles, men can allow or deny access to new information and necessary resources (e.g., soap, handwashing station). They can enable, reinforce, and sustain behavior change.
- When men are engaged early on in the discussion they are more likely to take an active role to mobilize family members, reinforce messages, and make the household available to receive handwashing with soap messages.
- Though women remain a critically important target audience for handwashing promotion, men should also be included as a target audience for mass media, direct consumer contact, and interpersonal communications.
Based on outcomes of the learning event, the team took several steps to adjust the intervention:

**Step 1:** Modify the training manual for relays and integrate through planned supervision and refresher trainings.

**Step 2:** Adjust communication materials (e.g., logo, billboards, television and radio spots) to increase the visibility of men’s role and strengthen their commitment to support handwashing with soap in the household.

The billboards in Illustration 1 show the adjustment made in visual materials targeting the public. The billboard created earlier in the project targeted women (left), and shows a woman in the foreground washing her hands. Her husband and children are pictured in the background. The caption emphasizes the woman’s role in handwashing behavior change: “I commit myself to get my family to adopt handwashing behavior.”

A subsequent billboard (right) illustrates the decision to include men in the media campaign. Here, a couple express a joint commitment: “We commit ourselves more than ever to get our family to adopt handwashing behavior.”

**Step 3:** During focus groups with women, fieldworkers will identify the households in which husbands have been

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**Figure 1: Leveraging the Role of Men in Handwashing Promotion**

As *gatekeepers*, men allow access to their household and provide funds for soap. As *protectors*, men can play a follow-up role to the outreach session and ensure that household members wash their hands with soap. As *role models*, men wash their hands with soap while encouraging others to do the same. Starting with gatekeeper, the level of effort required increases at each level.

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**Illustration 1: Adjusting Communication Materials to Emphasize Men’s Role**

A billboard produced to promote handwashing with soap was initially designed to target women (left). Recognizing the importance of men as heads of household, a later iteration (right) features a husband and wife.
exposed to handwashing messages during household visits and will try to collect information about changes in men’s attitudes or behavior with regard to handwashing within the household.

Step 4: Adjust the monitoring tools to ensure effective and systematic capturing of men’s participation.

WHAT ELSE DO WE NEED TO KNOW?
As the team works to adjust the intervention by modifying training and communication materials and adjusting monitoring tools, several questions emerge, including: What is the most powerful motivator to engage men to support handwashing behavior change in their household? Does the inclusion of men have a catalyzing, neutral, or negative impact on women’s attitudes towards handwashing behavior change? Program managers should consider these questions and others as they develop current and future handwashing programs.

—By Seydou Nourou Koita

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About the project
Global Scaling Up Handwashing is a WSP project focused on learning how to apply innovative promotional approaches to behavior change to generate widespread and sustained improvements in handwashing with soap at scale among women of reproductive age (ages 15–49) and primary school-aged children (ages 5–9). The project is being implemented by local and national governments with technical support from WSP. To learn more, visit www.wsp.org/scalinguphandwashing.

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