

**35th WEDC International Conference, Loughborough, UK, 2011**

THE FUTURE OF WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE:  
INNOVATION, ADAPTATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN A CHANGING WORLD

**Effects of program and institutional design on district-level  
CLTS management in Malawi**

*J. A. Maulit & M. Kang, Canada*

**BRIEFING PAPER 1244**

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*Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) is a participatory method for sanitation promotion that is quickly becoming the primary approach used by developing countries to generate improvements in sanitation behaviour, resulting in open defecation free (ODF) communities. Since 2009, Engineers Without Borders Canada has worked in Malawi to provide technical assistance on CLTS to 12 districts. EWB has gathered evidence that the management behaviour of the district is a key indicator of whether CLTS implementation will achieve ODF sustainability in Malawi. Program designers such as national governments and major donors can encourage good management by creating incentives and systems for project implementation that encourage these behaviours in districts. Furthermore, program designers should recognize that a lack these incentives and systems discourages good management in districts, and that effective CLTS implementation cannot happen without good management behaviours.*

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**Introduction: sanitation and CLTS in Malawi**

Community Led-Total Sanitation (CLTS) is a participatory approach to sanitation behaviour change that involves four main stages of field activity: pre-triggering, triggering, post-triggering or follow-ups, and celebration and verification. It leads communities to the realization that they are ingesting faeces and ultimately creates open defecation free (ODF) villages. CLTS has been implemented in Malawi since 2007. Despite years of investments in CLTS and other sanitation interventions, Malawi has yet to see a sustainable improvement in rural sanitation (i.e. improved latrine use creating ODF communities). According to a recent sanitation sector review, even though “60% of Malawians have access to improved sanitation; many stakeholders consider the situation to [be] very poor in some areas. 11% of the population practice open defecation.” [DeGabriele, 2009].

Since 2009, Engineers Without Borders (EWB) Canada has provided technical assistance to 12 districts through skills development, support and development of organizational processes that support CLTS. EWB’s experience has shown that the critical element lacking for effective CLTS implementation is not technical skill, but rather the management ability at the district level.

**District realities: management behaviours**

EWB’s experience has highlighted two key management behaviours that form the minimum capacity needed for effective CLTS implementation: planning, and critical review consisting of comparison of activities against the outcomes they are meant to achieve. Program designers have a key role to play in building good management behaviours by ensuring the right combination of skills, incentives, and means are present at the district level. If they fail to ensure all of these elements are present, CLTS implementation suffers and ODF behaviour is unlikely to be sustained.

**Planning behaviours**

Inadequate pre-planning has been observed to be a significant problem for CLTS implementers. Districts often fail to pre-trigger communities, resulting in poor attendance at triggering events. The time needed to procure essential supplies for triggering, such as flip charts, markers, sawdust, and fish, is often not

considered, resulting in the need to delay activities. Resources, including transport, fuel, or allowances required to deploy field staff to implement CLTS, are often not included in monthly work plans and budgets, sometimes resulting in cancellation of events altogether. Follow-up activities, which are essential to the success of CLTS, are often neglected because field staff fail to plan for them.

### **District example: neglected follow-ups due to planning failures**

ODF sustainability is far more likely to be achieved if regular follow-ups to the community take place [Kar and Chambers, 2008]. Once a village is triggered, its status in terms of community behaviours can only be ascertained through these visits. Support to community leaders who champion ODF and technical guidance cannot be provided without follow-up. As of September 2010, EWB observed that only 3 of the 12 districts in Malawi implementing CLTS were able to produce data collected from follow-up activities and a follow-up plan based on status of villages triggered in 2010. These figures suggest that the majority of CLTS implementation in Malawi is skipping this crucial step.

Lack of follow-ups is largely a result of planning failures. Often there are no allocated resources or extension staff to go to the field when they are needed. This is in part because of failure to include follow-up activities in extension staff work plans. Chronic planning failure is a systemic issue. There are few incentives to plan because resource disbursement from donors is difficult to predict. This means that plans may fall through even if they are created, and progress on plan execution is not tracked.

### **Critical review behaviours**

Critical review of progress using up-to-date information allows district managers to make decisions on how to improve CLTS programs' effectiveness in their district. Despite the importance of this information, data management and subsequent evidence-based decision making are challenges for district managers. Basic information, such as which villages have been triggered and the ODF status of those villages is not regularly collected or stored, precluding any evidence-based allocation of available resources. Conducting follow-up visits to triggered villages happens rarely due to budgetary issues and management incentives. Without information on village status that comes from follow-ups, managers can be misled into measuring success by the number of triggered villages rather than ODF achievement.

### **Management: a systemic issue**

Management for CLTS is obviously a concern at the district level; however, the size of the management deficit for CLTS projects suggests that the constraint is not individual management skill. In fact, some extension staff are experienced and capable managers. Rather the constraint limiting the success of CLTS is the enabling environment for CLTS projects. If donors aim to maximize the impact of their CLTS projects they need to consider the wider enabling environment in which their projects are operating. In Malawi, the enabling environment includes the national coordination of sector actors, role definitions of CLTS managers and staff within the district, and CLTS performance indicators.

### **National coordination**

At the national level in Malawi, there are no systems in place to coordinate all of the players in the sector. Sanitation is the responsibility of the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development (MoIWD), however the cooperation of the Ministry of Health is essential because they employ the bulk of the extension staff responsible for implementation. While the Ministry of Health typically has several hundred field-based Health Surveillance Assistants (HSAs) in each district, the MoIWD typically has fewer than 10 extension staff. In the absence of a system or process in place to nationally mandate these sectors to share these resources, MoIWD is unable to easily second resources from Health.

### **Clear role definitions**

In Malawi, CLTS is currently a district responsibility in general, but the specific roles of different staff are not clearly defined leading to ambiguity about who is directly responsible for CLTS projects. The lack of specific people assigned to conduct CLTS activities often forces managers to scramble to mobilize extension

staff for CLTS from various sectors. CLTS is currently not included in the job descriptions of HSAs and therefore is seen as a donor project rather than a regular component of HSA work.

### **District example: utilization of HSAs to accelerate CLTS progress**

Integrating CLTS into HSA field work allows districts to become independent of funding from external donors. An added benefit is that monthly data collection occurs because HSAs have incorporated CLTS information into their monthly reports. In one district, managers included CLTS into the routine work of HSAs when a cholera outbreak occurred at the start of 2010. CLTS activities were added to HSA reporting expectations and HSAs were trained in facilitation. Expectations were set that it was within HSAs' regular scope of work to trigger the villages within their catchment areas and to conduct the subsequent follow-ups needed to reach ODF. As of August 2010, 118 villages have been triggered and 20 villages have been declared ODF with an additional 70 awaiting verification. All of these activities were done using district resources because donor resources were delayed for most of the year. In contrast, a second district planned to trigger 200 communities but no activities were conducted due to delayed funding from the national donor.

### **Information management systems and outcome-oriented performance indicators**

Information management systems have faced challenges across the sector, as few incentives are in place for managers to ensure that data is gathered and used effectively. Currently, information is only collected when it is demanded by donors and the national government, suggesting that the main incentive to collect data is donor demand rather than the desire to understand and improve implementation. Data collection at other times of the year is de-prioritized by busy district managers, and feedback is rarely given to districts on how the data is used after submission, decreasing the perceived value of data collection by district staff.

### **District example: biased and incomplete systems to recognize performance**

EWB has seen evidence of competition between districts being a motivator for improved performance. One district stated a goal of "beating" another district by triggering more villages. However, due to inconsistent definition of outcomes (ODF status), districts are unable to compare themselves in the same way, limiting the recognition they get for achieving ODF outcomes and limiting incentives to produce these outcomes. One district reports that over 400 villages have been triggered and 77% of them have achieved ODF status. This district defines village ODF status as whether or not latrines are present with no mention of facility quality. In contrast, another district declares a village as ODF only if all latrines have both a cover (to manage flies) and hand washing facilities, and they report a success rate of only 3% ODF. These numbers cannot be compared as performance indicators because they measure different outcomes, and recognition is biased towards districts with lower standards of definition of ODF.

Currently, national government and donors emphasize the number of people reached by the triggering process as the indicator for CLTS success. ODF village numbers are also tracked, but this is seen as a subjective indicator that does not lend itself to comparison of different districts' performance because there is no agreed upon definition of ODF. No national indicators for CLTS have been established, leaving district managers without guidance on which figures are important to track in order to assess their progress. When district performance is tracked solely by the number of triggered villages, managers are incentivized to focus solely on conducting triggering activities as opposed to other key activities such as follow-ups, data collection, and critical review, which are necessary for the achievement of ODF sustainability.

### **Recommendations for CLTS program designers**

In order to further improve district management capacity for CLTS, program designers such as major donors and national governments have a role to play in creating an enabling environment that incentivizes and

facilitates crucial management behaviours. The following elements are important considerations for these individuals to take when supporting CLTS activities.

### **Collaboration with relevant ministries**

Donors that wish to institutionalize CLTS as the approach for sanitation promotion should collaborate with relevant ministries at the national government level, to encourage cooperation between ministries. Structures are required to institutionalize the approach so that district managers have the agency to mobilize extension staff without being dependent on external funding.

### **Role definition for CLTS**

Program designers such as major donors should work with ministries within the sanitation sector to help create role definitions for district staff that incorporate CLTS into the current institutional structure. The incorporation of CLTS within the job description of HSAs would mean that the only resources needed would be the one-time cost of training extension staff and fuel and allowances for district staff supervising the activities of field staff at regular intervals. The remainder of the CLTS process can be handled by the HSAs, who are based in their catchment areas.

### **Focus on outcome indicators**

Donors should focus on the creation of outcome-focused performance indicators and processes at the outset of the CLTS program. Appropriate indicators and processes would motivate implementers to focus on effectiveness of managing their CLTS programs' outcomes rather than outputs, allow for benchmarking of performance across districts, and better highlight areas of needed support. Tracking of additional weighted indicators would allow CLTS programs to be benchmarked for appropriate comparison and realistic program assessment. Examples of additional indicators include factors such as budgets spent versus ODF results achieved, existence of follow-up plans, percentage of ODF villages against triggered villages, and percentage increase of pit latrines with drop-hole covers and hand washing facilities.

### **Conclusions**

EWB's experience has shown that district planning and critical review behaviours are a precursor to effective CLTS delivery. The enabling environment must incentivize these behaviours. Coordination between sanitation sector actors, clear role definitions, stronger information management and comprehensive indicators will help district managers to achieve their CLTS goals. EWB's work has generated evidence that while these interventions can create change in individuals and certain districts, overall program design changes would create more scalable impact. To maximize this impact, major CLTS donors should examine and act on the enabling environment in which their project operates. In Malawi, this means that donors would work with relevant national ministries, set up roles that support the institutionalization of the approach, and modify project indicators to focus on outcome achievement.

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### **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to acknowledge other members of EWB Malawi Team who provided editing support for this paper. The authors would further like to acknowledge UNICEF Malawi and all district staff with whom they have worked.

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### **Contact details**

Jolly Ann Maulit  
Engineers Without Borders Canada  
Box 2207 Lilongwe, Malawi  
Tel: + 265 993 991 728  
Email: jollyannmaulit@ewb.ca  
www.ewb.ca

Mike Kang  
Engineers Without Borders Canada  
Box 2207 Lilongwe, Malawi  
Tel: + 265 999 034 067  
Email: mikekang@ewb.ca  
www.ewb.ca