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Improving Sanitation, Building Skills in
Household Latrine Construction
GHANA **WASH** PROJECT

The Ghana WASH Project is working in rural communities to address the country's sanitation challenges. By training local artisans, partnering with community households and supporting community management of sanitation facilities, the project is building lasting solutions.

For Patience Botwey, who lives in the rural community of Kyiren in Ghana's Central Region, going to relieve herself meant a march into the nearby woods. It was believed that people should not live near their toilet facilities so community members relieved themselves far away from the community. Without a household or community latrine that she could reliably use, her best option was to take care of her bodily needs in an area separated from the community, and in the privacy of wooded cover.

A few years ago, the community constructed a public latrine for its members, but because of poor management, the facility was not regularly maintained. Once the facility became filthy, the people returned to their former defecation zone -- to the forest, which had served their purposes in the past. Even at night, and in the pouring rain, Patience and other community members would trudge out of their homes and into the woods to relieve themselves. This practice, known as "open defecation" (referred to lo-

cally in Ghana as "free range"), refers to the practice of urinating or defecating outdoors in the open, such as in open drains, fields, streams, the bush and at beaches, where people can come in contact with the human feces.

The Ghana Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Project (GWASH) identified Patience's community of Kyiren, along with the neighboring community of Adaa, as two of those in major need of assistance in improving their sanitation situation. The interventions in these communities included first, working with community household to identify those willing to commit to improving their sanitation situation and investing in household latrines; second, training local individuals as artisans skilled in latrine construction and maintenance; third, mobilizing households to acquire the necessary materials to contribute to latrine construction; and fourth, empowering community members to make wide-spread changes in their hygiene practices and management.

Linking Sanitation to Community Health and Development

Open defecation, which is often regularly practiced throughout rural communities in Ghana, can have dramatic impacts on community health and wellness.

"The people of Adaa and Kyiren have had high cases of sanitation-related diseases due to the practice of open defecation," says Felix Amofa, Sanitation Coordinator for GWASH. Such sicknesses can include diarrhea and cholera. That said, the negative impact of poor community sanitation can extend beyond immediate health risks; lack of improved sanitation and WASH education can also stymie economic and social development. The contamination of agricultural produce means a smaller quality crop yield, and pollution of surface ground water. When children fall sick from sanitation-related diseases, they are unable to attend school; when parents continually fall sick, they are unable to work, negatively impacting their ability to pay for school and other fees.

Improving Sanitation Through Collaborative Efforts

GWASH works with communities to help construct household latrines, which are enclosed (walled and roofed) toilet facilities where members of a household can relieve themselves in conveniently private and nearby space. These latrines are also a form of improved sanitation, by hygienically separating human feces from human contact. The new facilities, built for people like Patience and her family, are constructed with the support and involvement of many partners, includ-

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The [Ghana Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Project](#) is a four-year USAID-funded initiative to improve rural water, sanitation, and hygiene in Ghana. GWASH is implemented by Relief International, Winrock International, and the Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA). Working with local actors and community members, GWASH is engaged in five regions, 22 districts, and more than 160 communities to assist in the achievement of Ghana's national WASH goals.

Relief International provides emergency, rehabilitation and development services that empower beneficiaries in the process. Relief International employs an innovative approach to program design and a high quality of implementation performance in demonstrating deep and lasting impact in reducing human suffering worldwide. ADRA was established by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to provide humanitarian relief and welfare. The agency's work seeks to improve the quality of life of those in need through emergency management as well as community development initiatives. Winrock International is a non-profit organization working with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources.

ing community members themselves: Local NGOs, local government, local artisans, individual households and water and sanitation (watsan) committees all contribute to sanitation improvements. The approach includes skills training, education, and community involvement to ensure the sustainability of sanitation interventions.

Implementing a total sanitation program requires capacity building extending from local artisan training and physical construction to educational follow-up that targets behavioral change. GWASH collaborates with district assemblies in leading trainings for local artisans on the construction and maintenance of household latrines. Local government partnerships assist in the facilitation of community meetings and communications.

GWASH partners with local NGOs that are well integrated in the community; these organizations have developed strong relationships and built trust with the community, and they understand the community language and culture. Through local NGOs and local government, GWASH builds on existing inroads into communities. In both Kyiren and Aada, GWASH has partnered with the New Life Foundation, a local NGO based in Gomoa West that has been operating in the area for nearly a decade.

The New Life Foundation recruits local artisans to be trained, and the training sessions for Aada and Kyiren were facilitated by the District Engineer of Gomoa West and Mr. Amofa. In these sessions, local artisans learned the step-by-step construction of latrines by viewing illustrative diagrams; they also learned how and why the latrines work. They then received a step-by-step construction tutorial of the household latrine. This in-depth training provided local artisans with the skills and capacity necessary to construct latrines for these two communities and beyond.

The artisans were trained to build the Kumasi Ventilated Improved Pit (KVIP), a latrine facility developed in Kumasi, Ghana in the 1970s. Latrine facilities were first constructed as a solution to the lack of public toilets, but their construction has since been expanded to serve household-

based sanitation needs. The KVIP latrine consists of two underground pits; when one becomes full, it is left to compost while the other pit is utilized. Once the first pit is fully composted, the remains can be removed and disposed of without risk to community health. Because this model requires little maintenance and no water, it is ideal for rural and even remote communities like Aada and Kyiren, where GWASH is at work.

The project provides integrated training to 350 local masons in household latrine construction.



Matthew Donkor

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— Matthew Donkor, a newly trained latrine artisan



Oscar Kyere, latrine artisan and household latrine beneficiary, Adaa, Central Region

In these two communities, local artisans were trained to build the high-subsidy model KVIP latrine because of its long-lasting nature. “High-subsidy” refers to the fact that households were required to contribute minimal costs. However, moving forward, the focus will be on providing low-subsidy latrines and introducing more model options, which will allow beneficiaries to choose an affordable option that meets both their sanitation needs and their household budgets. Beneficiaries will contribute a greater portion of the materials than before, including labor, to support the building of the latrine. This element of the intervention creates a greater sense of value and ownership over the facility.

In order to explain the structure and costs to local artisans and beneficiaries, graphic booklets were developed, which demonstrate the re-

quired materials, overall latrine structure, and costs. Beneficiaries choose from among nine models, which incorporate such locally available materials as iron roofing, bamboo, thatch and brick. The booklets explain beneficiaries’ required commitment for a latrine with visual images so the information is easily understandable for both literate and low-literate individuals.

Matthew Donker of Kyiren participated in the local artisan training program, and he glowed as he described his gains: “The skills I have acquired have positively impacted my life because now it is my source of livelihood. I now have an income that pays for school fees and feeds my children,” he said in a conversation translated from Fante Twi. He has even been contacted by community members interested in hiring him for private projects. A father of six children, he joked, “Because of

The Ghana WASH Project is building 4,680 household latrines.

this work, I am going to give birth again!” Many local artisans, like Matthew, did not have any prior construction experience. So this training has provided Matthew with new skills that he will use to make a living and that he can pass on to others.

In Adaa, another latrine artisan, Oscar Kyere, expresses his appreciation. He claimed distress, but with a smile: “I can’t sleep – everyone is knocking on my door worrying me. They want to make sure their name is on the list to get a latrine. I am backlogged 15 households of people who want the facilities!” Although Oscar pretends to be annoyed by this, he cannot mask his happiness – the work brings income for him to provide for his family.

Communities can continue building and maintaining latrines with these artisans long after GWASH concludes its work. Simply helping to construct the latrines alone is an insufficient effort, so an educational component on good hygiene practices is a critical part of the way GWASH helps to change hygiene behavior.

Ensuring Sustainability through Community WatSan Committees

Educational follow-up is the last step, and it is here that the role of water and sanitation (watsan) committees play their role. These committees ensure community investment and participation in the project, as well as local management. Watsan committees use hygiene education programs to instill meaningful behavioral changes to discourage open defecation.

These watsan committees are essential for developing a local force for ensuring that good hygiene practices are adopted by the community. Working with the local NGOs, GWASH recruits and trains community watsan members, who will go on to implement hygiene education and promotion within their own



Local artisans pose with GWASH Sanitation Coordinator Felix Amofa (far left), in front of latrine they constructed as part of their training community.

These committees are empowered through trainings on water, sanitation and hygiene. Following these trainings, the watsan committees act as promoters of water and sanitation issues, responsible usage and maintenance of latrines, and positive hygiene practices. They also mobilize community action to address sanitation needs as they arise.

According to Mr. Amofa, the watsan committees are critical to ensuring the continued viability of the facilities constructed through GWASH Project. “[These] committees help maintain the water and sanitation facilities given to communities, schools and individuals and the role of the members,” he said. While GWASH works in the committee in the short term, committee members, with support from the local NGOs, are the agents who will ensure the long-term success of the household latrines and lasting community behavior change.

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— Oscar Kyere, newly trained local artisan





Kweku Mensah and his wife pose in front of their family's new latrine.

A New Household Latrine for Kweku Mensah & His Family

Kweku Mensah, 70 years old and the head of a household of eight, radiates with pride over his family's new household latrine. He is eager to share the story of how the new facility has positively impacted the life of his family in the community of Adaa in Gomoa West, Central Region.

Unlike Patience and most other families in Adaa and Kyiren, Kweku and his family had a facility prior to the installation of their new latrine. However, the latrine was open, making its occupants easily visible to the public. It was also improperly ventilated, emanating bad odors and allowing access to flies, who could easily transfer feces to food. Because of its poor construction with less-than-durable materials, the latrine had become run down. Its rickety wooden floor boards had become a safety concern; they also left open spaces and gaps where for small children could easily fall through. Overall, Kweku felt it was not a safe facility for his family.

According to Felix Amofa, Sanitation Coordinator for GWASH, Kweku's family's latrine was archetypal to the existing challenges for the community. The few existing latrines in both communities generated bad odors, and the structures enabled flies to access the feces, which facilitated the spread of disease; it also put users at risk of snake and rodent bites.

The opportunity to construct household latrines has brought tremendous economic opportunities for local artisans, but community members like Kweku are also finding ways to contribute. At 65 years old, Kweku not only dug the eight-foot-deep pit for his family's latrine, but he also dug 15 additional pits in the community, earning 150 Ghana cedis (\$US 90).

Kweku gave a tour of his family's new latrine and showed how instead of the standard eggplant-shaped hole in the cement floor, extra concrete has been added to create a raised seat. When asked about this, he laughed, saying it was built especially for him and his wife, as they are old and unable to crouch for a long time when relieving themselves.

Kweku and his family take great pride in their new facility. Since construction, the Mensah family has added some renovations, including a fresh coat of cream-colored paint and the installation of electric-powered light, fed by wire in through the latrine roof. "We brought light to the latrine," Kweku said. "It helps us find the right location so we don't soil the wrong spot!"

Kweku's was one of the first households with a completed latrine. While his neighbors' latrines were still in under construction, he is allowing them to use his old latrine as an alternative to open defecation.

According to Kweku, the new latrine has created a healthier home and environment for his family as it is cleaner, odorless, and more convenient. Aside from the new facility, Kweku, his family, and fellow community members participated in a behavior change communications (BCC) intervention implemented by GWASH, which emphasized the importance of practicing good hygiene and sanitation. Through the interventions, Kweku and his neighbors have learned about the importance of hand washing after visiting the latrine, and other ways to ensure proper hygiene within the community.

According to Kweku, these interventions are making a difference. "We have appreciated the need and importance of hand washing with soap at critical times, especially after using the toilet, and by extension we are also spreading this knowledge to others in the community as well as keeping the surroundings clean," Kweku said.

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