To wash or not to wash? Towards the development of the UNICEF Malawi handwashing with soap program

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63% of Malawi's children are multidimensionally poor.
Background

Adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities are key to reducing the risks of diseases such as diarrhoea, which kills many children in Malawi.

Simple hand washing with soap therefore is the most cost effective intervention to prevent many diseases that claim lives of children and leave many disfigured.

Only 0.1 percent of mothers wash their hands with soap at all critical times such as before preparing food, eating, changing babies’ nappies, after using toilets, and feeding babies.

In primary schools, the sanitation coverage is estimated at 23 percent. Only 4.2 percent of schools have hand washing facilities with soap.

On a positive note, 81.5 percent of schools use a protected water source.
Problem

→ Diarrhoea is one of the major causes of morbidity and mortality among children and immune-compromised individuals in Malawi

→ 18 percent of Malawian children under the age of five had diarrhoea in the two weeks preceding the survey (Malawi Demographic Health Survey 2010).
A new approach for primary school children

- To combat this problem, UNICEF Malawi have introduced a new approach: Social Marketing
- But first, we need to do some formative research to understand
- Commissioned by UNICEF Malawi, was developed by PSI Malawi and Griffith University and conducted by PSI Malawi.
Formative research study

Observations of primary school children after toileting and during breaks were conducted.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with one school administrator and one member of staff from each school to understand Motivation, Opportunities and Ability (MOA) factors (Rothschild, 1999) around provision of soap and access to hand washing facilities in primary schools.

Three Malawian school districts: Nkhatabay, Salima and Mangochi.

Thirty primary schools (ten from each district) participated in the baseline study.

Hand washing behavior of 3,675 primary school children (1,900 girls; 1,775 boys) was observed.
Results- handwashing facilities

- Only two (3.33%) out of 60 toilets (boys and girls) observed had soap for hand washing at the time of the visit.
- Less than half (41.7%) of the assessed schools had hand washing facilities. No hand washing facilities were observed in Mangochi district.
- The most common hand washing facility was the bucket (48%)
- 64% of hand washing facilities were outside the toilet, 28% near the classroom and 8% were found outside toilet stalls.
- 56% of the hand washing facilities had water and 76% of these had clean water.
- 33% of the toilets were clean, 38% were somewhat dirty, and 28% were very dirty.
Results- handwashing behaviour

- 85% of primary school children failed to wash their hands before eating and after visiting the toilet.
- 14% of the observed students washed their hands with water but did not use soap.
- In Mangochi district, all students observed failed to wash their hands as there were no hand washing facilities found in any of the ten primary schools.
Results: Handwashing facilities observed

- Water bucket: 48%
- Sink: 16%
- Improvised tap: 16%
- Piped water: 8%
- Water tank: 8%
- Suspended plastic bottles: 4%
Results- MOA

→ To motivate students to wash their hands, external health personnel also visit the schools to educate them on the importance of hand washing.
→ Many schools lack the financial resources to buy soap and construct permanent hand washing facilities.
→ Water is also scarce in the schools thus preventing students from using water for hand washing.
→ Many schools also experience a lack of support from the community and students themselves, as many are not aware of the benefits of HWWS.
Other factors preventing students from washing their hands with soap include children not being accustomed to HWWS in their homes, and their lack of knowledge about disease prevention and inadequate hand washing facilities.

Teachers sometimes educate them on the importance of hand washing. School prefects are used by some schools to reinforce hand washing behavior.
Where to from here?

- A whole of community approach is required to generate a change in HWWS culture.
- Changes to school and community infrastructure to facilitate the performance of the behaviour.
- Segmented social marketing programs developed
- Supporting programs to sustain behaviour over time
Questions?