

Selecting appropriate communication methods for hygiene education

Communication

Communication involves sharing information between people and reaching a common understanding. Good communication is a *two-way process*. Planning effective communication involves deciding :

- *Who* is the audience or target group ;
- *Who* should do the communication ;
- *What* should be communicated ; that is, what the message will be ;
- *How* will it be communicated ; that is, what methods will be used.

Target groups and messages are discussed in Fact Sheets 4.5 and 4.7.

Methods of communication

The choice of communication method and supporting learning aids will depend on what is to be achieved, the nature of the audience and what resources are available. The starting point for choosing methods should be an analysis of what is to be conveyed. Is it necessary to change a belief - and will it be a weakly-held one or a strongly-held one rooted in culture or experience ? Is the purpose to give simple facts, explain complicated ideas or teach a skill ?

Each method has its advantages. For example, to show someone what an improved latrine *looks* like it will require a method that has a visual dimension.

Mass media are the best methods for rapid spread of simple information and facts to a large population at low cost. If the advice is realistic and the message pre-tested, the message can be

accurately transmitted without the distortions that can sometimes take place when relying on word-of-mouth.

In addition, consideration will have to be given to practical considerations such as cost, the need for maintenance, electricity black-out and the ease of use. In a remote area, there may not be access to mass media, such as radio or newspapers. In a city and without a large team, there may be little choice but to use methods such as radio, leaflets or posters that do not need field staff.

A useful guide to planning hygiene education is to start with simpler methods first, such as radio, leaflets, posters and public meetings, and see if they are effective. Only if the simple methods do not work, should there be recourse to the more expensive methods involving extensive use of fieldworkers. Short-term approaches can be accompanied by longer-term strategies, such as working through schools and the workplace (see Fact Sheets 4.10 and 4.12).

Participatory learning

In carrying out your hygiene education, emphasis should be placed on *participatory learning methods* which can include small group teaching, simulations, case studies, group exercises and role play. When using participatory learning methods, it is important to remember the following points :

- Avoid formal lecture presentations ;
- Encourage discussion between participants ;
- Encourage active movement and talking during the sessions ;
- Use a variety of games, puzzles and exercises ;
- Use learning aids that stimulate discussion and comments.

Participatory learning methods have many advantages : the participants are active so they are more likely to remember what was introduced during the session ; the participants draw from their own experience ; they are allowed to discover principles for themselves ; opportunities are provided for learning problem-solving skills and empowerment of communities - building confidence to tackle problems and improve their conditions.

Popular media

Traditional media, such as drama, songs and story-telling, offer rich potential and have been used for sanitation and hygiene education. They can combine entertainment with practical advice, and can be used to stimulate discussion and community participation. They can be performed by a hygiene or health worker but it is usually better to provide basic information on hygiene and health to the actors and musicians, and let them develop a performance that is entertaining and understood by the community. Another approach is to involve members of the community in performances (see Fact Sheet 4.11).

Demonstrations

One of the most powerful forms of communication is through demonstration with real-life examples, such as a demonstration latrine in a well-chosen location and examples of model practice. Demonstrations are most powerful if you can show observable benefits in the short term. Unfortunately the health benefits from sanitation and hygiene can take time to materialize, so it is best to emphasize immediate benefits such as convenience, comfort and, where appropriate, freedom from flies and smells.

Satisfied acceptors

Another valuable method is the use of satisfied acceptors. These are persons who have improved their sanitation or practised hygiene measures and are pleased with the results. They are the best people to explain the benefits to the others. They will use everyday language and will have more credibility with the community.

Communication support materials

A range of learning materials, such as flipcharts, leaflets, posters and models, can be developed to support education work. These should be pre-tested on a sample of the intended audience to ensure that the pictures and words are easily understood, and that the advice is relevant and meets the community's needs. A useful approach is to use local artists and to encourage them to work with the community to prepare materials (see Fact Sheet 4.11).

Training of field staff

It is best to use educational methods that are already familiar to field staff and the community. There will, however, probably be a need to build in some training for field staff and volunteers in communication techniques, especially when using some of the newer participatory learning methods.

Effective hygiene education

The characteristics of effective hygiene education may be summarized as follows:

- Promotes actions that are realistic and feasible within the constraints faced by the community.
- Builds on ideas, concepts and practices that people already have.
- Is repeated and reinforced over time using different methods.
- Is adaptable, and uses existing channels of communication - for example songs, drama and story telling.
- Is entertaining and attracts the community's attention.
- Uses clear simple language with local expressions and emphasizes short-term benefits of action.
- Provides opportunities for dialogue and discussion to allow learner participation, and feedback on understanding and implementation.
- Uses demonstrations to show the benefits of adopting practices.