

# In dialogue and partnership: improving health and hygiene

## Learning from successes in South Sudan

In June 2019, one-fifth of households in Mahad Camp, Juba, took part in a survey by ACROSS – Tearfund’s partner in South Sudan. Sixty-two per cent of respondents – who have been internally displaced by South Sudan’s civil war – obtained water for drinking from the local river, an unsafe source. Only 36 per cent treated it. More than half of respondents practised hand washing before preparing food, before and after eating, and after using the latrine; but fewer than 30 per cent practised any additional handwashing, such as after handling rubbish or before feeding a child. In 70 per cent of households, at least one family member had suffered from diarrhoea in the two weeks preceding the survey. Open defecation by children was common in the camp – where there were very few latrines, no public handwashing stations and no rubbish removal – and there were frequent overflows from the latrines, owing to plastic rubbish thrown in them.

In January 2020, ACROSS conducted a second survey. River water consumption had dropped by 35 per cent since the first survey and there was instead an increase in households who purchased their drinking water, from either mobile suppliers or community elders who supply water from tanks. Sixty-five per cent of respondents now treated their water. The percentage of respondents who practised all types of handwashing had increased, and just 22 per cent of households had suffered from diarrhoea in the preceding two weeks – a decrease of 48 per cent that exceeds normal seasonal variation in incidence of the disease. Enumerators of the survey observed hardly any open defecation around the camp. Moreover, a variety of stakeholders attested to the fact that people were using ibriks for cleansing after using the latrine, instead of single-use plastic bottles.<sup>1</sup> Thus, plastic bottles were no longer being used and discarded in the latrines in large numbers.

### WASH Project in Mahad IDP Camp

**Location:** Mahad Camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Juba, South Sudan

**Period of implementation:** March 2019–January 2020

**Implemented by:** ACROSS

**Funded by:** Tearfund

**Evaluated:** In January and February 2020 by an evaluation team led by ACROSS staff

<sup>1</sup> In this project context, an ibrik is a reusable water container, used by residents for anal cleansing. At the time of the first survey, in June 2019, the majority of residents were using single-use plastic bottles for this purpose and then discarding them in the latrines.


## What impact are we celebrating?

Supported by Tearfund, ACROSS has been working with the three ethnic communities (Anyuak, Dinka and Murle) in Mahad IDP Camp since 2018. At the time of the first survey in June 2019, ACROSS had been implementing, for several months, a project that we believe contributed to the improvements observable by the time of the second survey.

*'It is clear to observe that significant behavioural change occurred among the people: they are more conscious of their personal hygiene and [...] more involved in keeping their surroundings clean and hygienic. This [...] has had tangible health outcomes in the community.'*<sup>2</sup>

The project's contribution is clear in data concerning from whom respondents had received health and hygiene messages. Eighty-six per cent of those surveyed by ACROSS in January 2020 (the endline survey) could recall hearing one or more health and hygiene messages from ACROSS staff in the preceding three months. Moreover, 40 per cent of respondents had heard hygiene messages from community hygiene promoters, an increase of 15 per cent from the June 2019 (baseline) survey.<sup>3</sup> Community hygiene promoters were male and female community members identified by camp elders as good role models, and then mobilised and trained under the ACROSS project. They worked alongside ACROSS staff, supporting the project's hygiene awareness campaign, and were more effective at delivering hygiene messages than staff members would have been on their own.



 Josephine Abui, a resident of Mahad Camp. We are also celebrating a significant impact of the project on women's wellbeing. Photo: Tom Price/Tearfund

<sup>2</sup> Kanju, Anita and Kimika Oddie (2020) *Mahad IDP Camp (Juba, South Sudan) Water Sanitation and Hygiene Endline Evaluation*, South Sudan: ACROSS/Tearfund, p 2.

<sup>3</sup> This compared to 54 per cent of respondents hearing these messages from other NGOs; four per cent from local hospitals or clinics; and two per cent from government health workers.

In addition, we are celebrating a significant impact of the project related to women's menstrual hygiene. The baseline survey had shown that the majority of women and girls in Mahad Camp lacked basic necessities to manage their periods safely and hygienically, and so chose to stay at home during menstruation. Those women who *were* able to access disposable sanitary pads had no choice but to dispose of them in the latrines, which was exacerbating latrine overflows and soil and water contamination. Moreover, 59 per cent of female respondents said that men and boys were not aware nor supportive of women facing challenges with their menstrual hygiene management (MHM).

The Tearfund-supported project therefore included a ground-breaking pilot whereby ACROSS introduced menstrual cups to 100 girls and women, to test community acceptance of this method of managing menstruation.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to the assumptions of some other actors, the pilot was overwhelmingly successful and generated much interest and demand throughout the community. ACROSS then worked with the pilot participants to co-design a MHM Plan for Mahad Camp, which included a series of recommendations. This led two other organisations to form a partnership with ACROSS and deliver a large-scale, blanket distribution of sustainable dignity kits to all menstruating girls and women in the camp – in accordance with the recommendations of the Plan.<sup>5</sup> Over 60 per cent of registered women and girls requested and received a menstrual cup in their kits.

This MHM pilot initially sparked curiosity – and some genuine concern – among residents of the camp, including community elders, parents of young girls, and husbands and fathers of pilot participants. In order to be accountable to the communities in Mahad Camp, ACROSS needed to respond to and allay these concerns. In doing so, they created spaces in which community members had conversations about menstrual hygiene and many men showed themselves to be willing and open to learning about the challenges that women and girls face, and how they might be better supported. These were conversations, the likes of which had not been had in the camp before. They indicate an unintended impact of this aspect of the project: a reduction in stigma around the topic of menstrual hygiene and an increase in support for, as well as among, women and girls in the camp.

## What lessons are we learning?

The design of this project and the impact that it had, showed us the importance of 'strong and empowering community engagement and participation, [...] consistent and repeated hygiene promotion messaging, matched with appropriate material inputs to enable behaviour change'.<sup>6</sup> For example, in order to contribute to improved hygiene practices, ACROSS conducted a hygiene awareness campaign of which some trained community members (the hygiene promoters mentioned above) were core implementers. In addition, potties were distributed to all households with children under the age of five, hand-washing units were installed next to the latrine blocks, and solar lights were mounted to the latrine blocks to enable safe access at night. The need for these infrastructure and specific material inputs was as expressed during consultations that ACROSS held with the communities at the start of the project.

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<sup>4</sup> An alternative to sanitary pads or tampons, menstrual cups collect menstrual blood rather than absorbing it. Made of 100% medical grade silicone, they are reusable for up to 10 years.

<sup>5</sup> ACROSS formed a partnership with Ruby Cup and collaborated with Peace Winds Japan to deliver the distribution.

<sup>6</sup> Kanju, Anita and Kimika Oddie (2020) *Mahad IDP Camp (Juba, South Sudan) Water Sanitation and Hygiene Endline Evaluation*, South Sudan: ACROSS/Tearfund, p 20.

Similarly, to contribute to more sustainable use of the latrines, ACROSS distributed ibriks to all households. Again, the communities themselves requested the ibriks: to be used for anal cleansing, as an alternative to the non-reusable, non-biodegradable plastic bottles that were previously causing latrine overflows. Furthermore, project staff worked with camp elders to select representatives from each of the camp's ethnic communities to become 'WASH Committee' members.<sup>7</sup> The WASH Committee has been trained and supplied with equipment for maintaining hygienic latrines, bathing shelters and hand-washing units.

*'This approach should be considered for any WASH [water, sanitation and hygiene] project, whereby "hardware" should never be delivered without the important "software" of community participation, training and hygiene promotion. Likewise, hygiene promotion alone, without provision of inputs required for putting the messages into practice, are also not conducive to positive behaviour change and sustainability.'*<sup>8</sup>

Finally, behind the impact of the MHM pilot were six female community members who were trained to be peer mentors. They tested the menstrual cups for themselves, and also worked alongside ACROSS staff to deliver monthly workshops for the other pilot participants. These were interactive, well-facilitated sessions with a relaxed and open atmosphere for participants to share their experiences of testing the cup and ask questions. The peer mentors also delivered information sessions for community elders, parents of young girls, and husbands and fathers of pilot participants. As explored above, these workshops were spaces in which the unintended impacts of reduced stigma, and increased male support for women, came about.



One of the monthly workshops facilitated for and attended by MHM pilot participants. Photo: ACROSS

<sup>7</sup> WASH refers to water, sanitation and hygiene.

<sup>8</sup> Kanju, Anita and Kimika Oddie (2020) *Mahad IDP Camp (Juba, South Sudan) Water Sanitation and Hygiene Endline Evaluation*, South Sudan: ACROSS/Tearfund, p 20.

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Each year, we analyse the past year's worth of Tearfund and partners' project evaluations. We then synthesise key learning and evidence of impact from them. This evaluation was one of 39 that we synthesised in 2021. It was selected for this case study because it was one of the most high scoring against the [Bond Evidence Principles](#) of voice and inclusion, appropriateness, triangulation, contribution, and transparency.

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