SANITATION PROGRESS IN TOUGHS PHYSICAL TERRAIN – A CASE STUDY OF BELEGETE COMMUNITY IN OBANLIKU LGA OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

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Introduction

United Purpose (formerly known as Concern Universal) is a UK-based international development charity with a goal to end poverty and inequality and move people beyond aid. Founded in 1976 and operating in 17 countries across Africa, Asia and South America, United Purpose (UP) receives funding from a range of donors; including the European Union, the United Nations and the governments of the United States, Australia, Ireland and the United Kingdom, as well as from other European countries and the private sector.

UP has worked in Nigeria since 2001 and is duly registered with the Federal Government of Nigeria (Ministry of Budget and National Planning). UP implements community-based development interventions in Benue and Cross River States, supporting communities to adopt improved sanitation and hygiene practices that reduce water-borne disease risk, and improve livelihoods, food security and resilience to climate change. We work in close partnership with the Federal, State and Local governments and civil society organisations. Our work was recently recognised by the Federal Ministry of Water Resources through an award for our support of the Clean Nigeria Campaign at the recent World Toilet Summit in November, 2022.

During more than a decade of work in Nigeria’s sanitation and hygiene sector using community-driven and behaviour change approaches, such as community-led total sanitation (CLTS), UP has worked with fragile communities, communities with entrenched cultural beliefs and hard-to-reach communities. This is partly due to the organisation’s focus on area-wide sanitation.

This challenging context case study research project is a collaboration between United Purpose and the Sanitation Learning Hub (SLH). The call for challenging context case studies by SLH presented a golden opportunity for UP to share its impact from past projects and contribute to the global body of knowledge on sanitation.

Context(s) and background

This case study focused on the adaptations made to implementation approaches that ensured the inclusion of the remote village of Belegete in Becheve Council ward of Obanliku Local Government Area (LGA), Cross River State, Nigeria in CLTS programming.

Belegete is located at the border of Nigeria and Cameroon in a lowland tropical rainforest surrounded by high-peak mountains and rivers. It is accessible on land from Obanliku only through the Obudu Mountain Resort. Reaching Belegete entails a 10-hour hike across 10 kilometres of bush tracks that run through mountains, valleys and forests, and cross a river.
The settlement is isolated, and members have difficulty accessing the regular markets in the ward to sell their farm produce and buy what they need, including sanitation and hygiene materials and accessories. Construction of toilets is an extremely difficult task due to the rocky soil formation. This exclusion has prevented technology transfer and peer learning with other communities. The community also lacks access to electricity, telecommunication, social media, and mainstream media including radio and television networks, which would have served as alternative channels for learning and strengthening the impact of behavior change messages.

Due to its isolated nature, Belegete seems to have been neglected by development interventions in the past years. This exclusion over the years has made them edgy and a bit unreceptive, perceiving most visitors as exploitative.

The Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion in Nigeria (RUSHPIN) Programme was a $7 million, eight-year (2012 – 2020) programme by the Government of Nigeria with funding support from the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), under the Global Sanitation Fund (GSF) scheme. The programme was executed on behalf of the Nigerian Government by UP, which worked with the Federal Ministry of Water Resources at the Federal Level, the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency (RUWASSA) at the state level and the Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Unit at the LGA level.

This was a flagship programme for the Government, focusing on area-wide sanitation in the rural areas and saw Obanliku LGA in Cross River state attain open defecation free (ODF) status in 2016, the first in Nigeria. By the close of the programme in 2020, five LGAs had been declared ODF by the National Task Group on Sanitation (NTGS) and 1.3 million people across nine LGAs in Benue and Cross River states were living in ODF environments.
The programme’s focus on area-wide sanitation and hygiene saw UP reach every community in the intervention LGAs, no matter how challenging the terrain. To successfully reach remote communities like Belegete, success entailed making significant adaptations to existing methods that were being employed at the time.

Programmatic approach/implementation strategy:

The RUSHPIN programme, as described in the section above, adopted CLTS as the main approach to programme implementation which was in line with Nigeria’s national strategy for achieving improved sanitation. This process involved facilitating community triggering sessions where communities draw out an action plan for achieving open defecation-free (ODF) status, conducting a minimum of 5 follow-up and monitoring visits to the triggered communities and supporting them to achieve open defecation-free status after which verification of ODF status was undertaken by the LGA, state and national Task Groups on sanitation. United Purpose was a facilitator of this process working through implementing partners such as the local government WASH units and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

A key part of the programme strategy was area-wide coverage and as such, United Purpose had an obligation to deliver programme outcomes in all selected LGAs. Achieving this in Becheve council ward of Obanliku LGA Cross River was particularly difficult because many communities including Belegete were very tough to access due to the difficult hilly terrain.

‘The programme team had the goal of attaining area-wide ODF first, hence we were encouraged to think outside the box’ – RUSHPIN Programme Manager
The WASH unit identified this challenge as a hindrance to achieving LGA-wide ODF status and it was discussed at the routine planning meeting with the two CSOs who were implementing partners on the programme already working in different council wards within the LGA. Fully aware of the challenge, one of the CSOs, Life Empowerment Foundation (LEF) took the responsibility of implementing in Becheve. However, to implement the programme successfully despite the obvious challenge, there was a need to incentivize the CSO. This consideration led to a significant modification in approach and funding to support LEF reach all the communities effectively. The modifications made included;

1. Constituting a CLTS team made of LEF staff and staff of LGA WASH unit that was willing to reside in the community to address the issue of inaccessibility and also to build rapport with the community members.

2. The team of facilitators were allowed to stay back and be resident in Belegete for a minimum of 1 week at each visit. This approach did not just reduce the difficulty of travel to the community if facilitators were to make daily visits as is typical of the CLTS process but also allowed a more hands-on approach, increasing the intensity of support to households within the community.

3. There was an upward review in the budget of the implementing partner to cover the cost of the extra level of effort required to engage with the community, and compensate facilitators for the extra days spent in the community as well as travel costs.

‘...We modified the proposed approach and funding required for LEF to be effective in reaching all the communities’ – RUSHPIN Programme Manager

We travel a day ahead with some basic supplies like food, medicine and toiletries and stay in the community for at least 1 week, working with them, sharing experiences and supporting them with ideas for toilet construction. – CSO Staff

Evidence and Progress to Date

The RUSHPIN programme was implemented in 9 LGAs (6 pilot LGAs and 3 scale-up) in Cross River and Benue States and reached over 1,200 communities in the target locations with CLTS intervention between 2012 and 2020 (8 years). All the communities in the target locations were successfully reached and supported to end open defecation. WASH committees (WASHCOM) were formed and trained in the communities to drive the needed changes and sustain programme results.

At the close of the programme in 2020, data show that over 1.3 million people across 9 LGAs in Benue and Cross River states were living in open defecation-free (ODF) environments\(^1\).

RUSHPIN Programme Outputs:

i. 2,772 communities in target LGAs took actions towards ending open defecation

\(^1\) Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion in Nigeria (RUSHPIN) Programme final report (2020)
ii. 1,367,744 people living in ODF environment

iii. 1,230,969 households practiced hand washing with soap and water at critical times

iv. WASHCOM trained across 2,772 communities to sustain the programme result.

**RUSHPIN Programme Outcome:**

i. The programme produced Nigeria’s first open defecation-free LGA (Obanliku) and demonstrated a workable model for area-wide sanitation progress is possible at a time when huge investment in the sector in Nigeria was yet to yield tangible results.

ii. After Obanliku, 4 other LGAs attained and were declared ODF by the National Task Group on Sanitation (NTGS).

iii. The programme supported 1.3 million people in 9 LGAs across Benue and Cross River state to live in open defecation free environment

**Progress in challenging context(s) – including outputs and outcomes:**

All 7 clusters in Belegete were triggered by the special CLTS team and supported through regular follow-up to end open defecation and construct and use household/institutional latrines.

**NOTE**

A cluster constitutes an average of 18 households and 180 people living together in a relatively enclosed geographical space. There is an average of 1.5km distance (usually across some hills and streams) between them. All 7 clusters in Belegete are however under the same traditional leadership.

**Output:**

i. 128 households in Belegete village constructed and used toilets

ii. 100 Hand Washing facilities were constructed and used for all toilets in Belegete

iii. 2 institutions (school and health post) in Belegete had access to a toilet with a hand washing station

**Outcome:**

i. The Local Task Group on Sanitation of Obanliku LGA verified all communities in the LGA including the 7 clusters in Belegete ODF. This was followed by certification of ODF status by the State Task Group on Sanitation which also did a 100% check of communities in the LGA (including the 7 clusters of Belegete and certified them ODF.

In 2016, the National Task Group on Sanitation undertook an ODF validation of the LGA which entails assessing 10% of the total number of communities as representative sample of the LGA (including the 7 clusters in Belegete community) leading to the LGA attaining ODF status.

**Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning:**

**Indicators used:**

- Number of people reached with hygiene messages
Number of communities declared Open Defecation Free
- Number of people that practice handwashing
- Number of people living in ODF environment

Any adaptations to monitoring and evaluation processes:

Weekly reporting and review meetings were established by programme implementing partners at the LGA level coordinated by the WASH unit. This was a platform for the field staff to submit their report and data, receive supervisory support, and address challenges they faced. The data would usually be collated and forwarded to the Executing Agency – United Purpose and RUWASSA as part of the report at the end of each month.

Due to the peculiarity of the Belegete intervention, the team was given a concession and allowed to attend only the last meeting before the due date of monthly reporting. Through this arrangement, they did not miss out on submitting monthly reports but they were not required to attend all the weekly meetings.

Engagements with others (communities and households, governments, rights holder organisations, unions etc.):

At the LGA level, the Obanliku LGA Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) unit was the main implementing partner of the intervention working closely with 2 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The WASH unit and the CSOs received funds from United Purpose based on work plans and implemented the planned activities with support from United Purpose and the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency in training and monitoring.

At the community level, the intervention engaged first with community leaders who provided safe conducive entry into the community and access to members. Eventually, the intervention engaged with all members of the communities including children, women, youth and the older population during CLTS triggering and follow-up. The intervention also engaged with institutions in the communities like schools, worship centres and health centres. Furthermore, community-level engagement also involved facilitating the setup and training of a Water Sanitation and Hygiene Committee (WASHCOM) which was tasked with the responsibility of undertaking hygiene promotion and supporting households to own and use toilets.

Engagements at the household level were undertaken by WASHCOMS who carried out household follow-up/support visits. Implementing partners like WASH unit and CSOs interfaced with the households quite often during routine monitoring visits. The Local Task Group on Sanitation (LTGS), the State Task Group on Sanitation (STGS) and the National Task Group on Sanitation (NTGS) also interfaced with the households during their visits for verification, certification and validation respectively.

Lessons Learned

i. Trust is earned and strengthened through genuine acts that connect development partners with the communities they serve. The act of field facilitators residing in Belegete community
and participating in their daily activities over a period of time broke the barriers that members of the community originally had about visitors. The process built trust and enabled easy penetration of the programme. This was also possible because some of the facilitators were originally from the council ward with a good understanding of the culture and peculiarities.

‘The presence of facilitators who relocated and stayed in the communities helped to deliver results for us because their presence gave the communities some sense of belonging which facilitated acceptance’ – Obanliku LGA WASH Coordinator

‘The people were really welcomed to our community, we gave them a place to stay and work with us’

– women’s group

ii. Targeting area-wide coverage in sanitation and hygiene projects provides an incentive for implementing partners to ensure no one is left behind. Implementing organisations in this situation will innovate to ensure that the hardest-to-reach communities are reached because of their contractual obligation.

iii. Flexibility and adaptation. The Global Sanitation Fund (GSF) for the RUSHPIN Programme was particularly flexible and allowed for changes in approach and how sub-grantees were funded. This gave rise to innovative solutions to many challenges encountered during the programme’s implementation. Donors should allow some room for a level of flexibility in their funding mechanisms.

iv. During the field visits for this case study development, the team observed that the ODF status achieved by Belegete was not sustained. Many household toilets got filled up and were never re-dug or emptied. The CSO that led the intervention in Belegete alluded to a poor sustainability plan, a claim that was also corroborated by the community that there were no visits to the community from the WASH unit again since they attained ODF status about 6 years ago. This brought out a clear lesson that the community needed to be engaged much more to actively contribute to post-ODF for the behaviour change gains to be maintained.

v. The case study of Belegete is a stark reminder that CLTS is a very good tool to mobilize communities and generate demand for improved sanitation but, alone, it is not sufficient to deliver improved sanitation sustainably.

‘For me, there was no good post-ODF sustainability plan in terms of budgeting for logistics to enable the WASH Unit to continue to follow up after the CSO pulled out to avoid slippages’ – CSO staff

Challenges faced (previous and current)

The main challenges that were encountered during this programme and that are liable to be faced by other interventions are enumerated below;
- Tough physical terrain makes it difficult for LGA to undertake routine monitoring and support visits. This affected the gender composition of the special team that was formed for the intervention in Belegete. No women joined the team. This affected the team’s ability to access women in the community.

- There was an initial resistance to the intervention by the community with the suspicion of exploitation due to the feeling the Government had abandoned them.

The ongoing challenges still being faced:

- Slippage was observed in all the clusters in Belegete which is because only local materials were used for the construction of unimproved latrines that collapsed over time. Also, due to the rocky terrain and difficulty in digging, the pits were not dug to an ideal depth so they filled quickly.

- Since the RUSHPIN programme ended in 2020, there has not been supportive monitoring visits to Belegete by the LGA WASH unit. The community did not receive enough support that would have led to a lasting behaviour change. This also points to the reality of the sanitation sector’s overdependence on donor-funded interventions where in most cases, the subnational government fail to take responsibility for sustaining project gains after they have ended.

‘The reason some people have gone back to their past practices of open defecation is that even though we cracked the rocks to dig our toilets at the early stage, they were not deep enough due to the difficult terrain and they got filled easily’ – Community Leader
‘We did not have enough money to buy cement and other materials, especially as the market is far, so we only constructed unimproved toilets, which collapsed’ – Community leader

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

- From the beginning of a project, the team should map out the intervention area properly and identify the areas that are considered ‘challenging contexts’ and start strategizing how to surmount the challenge early so efforts and gains achieved will be consolidated and a well-articulated sustainability plan put in place at the inception of the project.

- Over the years, development partners and civil society have advocated different arms of Government upgrade WASH units to departments, which will ensure budgets are allocated and the departments can run their plans and activities. Advocacy efforts in this regard should be sustained to ensure this is realized. Through this, the LGAs can be supported to develop and implement plans for continuous engagement with communities in tough physical terrain.

- To achieve better gender balance among staff working in physically tough terrain, there should be a strong incentive to attract more women to join such teams. This is based on the feedback given by the female staff of Obanliku WASH unit who said they didn’t consider the field allowances worth the risk.

‘Gender should be balanced in team composition when approaching communities and this could be made possible and facilitated through a special allowance for the team as a means of increasing motivation’ – WASH unit staff

- The study identified the importance of donor flexibility in developing innovative solutions to challenges that may arise during the implementation of WASH projects. Therefore, the study recommends that donor organisations allow a manageable level of flexibility in their funding mechanisms.

- The study also recommends that executing agencies and implementing partners maintain openness to understanding field contexts and foster creativity to provide adaptable local solutions to challenges that may arise during implementation. This can be achieved through continuous reflection, learning and coordination events where implementation strategies are reviewed such as the weekly partners coordination meeting at the LGA level, bi-monthly WASH clinics, and quarterly programme review meetings. Also, results-based funding serves as a great inspiration for creativity and innovation within projects.

- One of the key lessons from this study is the insufficiency of CLTS in delivering improved sanitation sustainably, especially in challenging context. The study, therefore, recommends that:

  i) Market-based sanitation approaches should be incorporated with CLTS in order to meet the supply side of the demand created by CLTS. This will ensure that the
communities have access to different improved sanitation options, also, households will also get financing options that will allow them to purchase an improved toilet.

ii.) WASH interventions should consider sanitation technologies that are suited for particularly challenging contexts and promote such technologies.

iii.) targeted SMART subsidies should be provided for the most vulnerable households to enable them to resolve issues of slippages by constructing improved sanitation.

iv.) Programmes should prioritize working with and through already established structures in challenging context that will ensure sustainability when they close. For example, there could have been an engagement of the health personnel(s) at the community health post in Belegete, this could have become the WASH unit’s contact with the community since the health personnel(s) usually come down to the LGA headquarters intermittently for medical supplies.
Appendices

1. Information Sources

1.1. Field Sources

1.1.1 Discussants (FGD), Obanliku LGA WASH Unit – 7 men, 3 women
1.1.2 List of Discussants (FGD), Balegete community Youth Group – 12 men (all over 18 years old)
1.1.3 List of Participants - Focused Group Discussion with Balegete community Women Group – 12 women
1.1.4 List of Participants - Focused Focus Group Discussion with Balegete Community WASHCOM – 2 men, 12 women
1.1.5 List of Key Informants - Balegete Community Leaders – 12 men
1.1.6 Key Informant - Local Task Group on Sanitation (LTGS) – female
1.1.7 Key Informant - Obanliku LGA WASH Coordinator – female
1.1.8 Key Informant – Civil Society Organization – male
1.1.9 Key Informant – RUSHPIN Management – male

1.2 Desk Sources

1.2.1 RUSHPIN Final Report, 2020

2. CASE STUDY DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

2.1: Guide for Key informant Interview with the Management of RUSHPIN Programme

i. What was your role in the RUSHPIN programme and Obanliku in particular?
ii. What were your key implementation plans/strategies for the programme?
iii. How did the plans/strategies change for Belegete village?
iv. What informed the change(s)?
v. Who was involved in this decision?
vi. How did the donor react to these changes and what were their views?
vii. What plans were put in place to monitor the implementation of the new strategies and the sustainability of the results?
viii. Did the peculiarity of Belegete village affect your reporting system, if yes how?
ix. What factors were considered in your selection of partners (CSOs) for the area and what was the collaboration like?
x. How can you describe the organization/management experience with Belegete village in terms of programming and what’s your recommendation for promoting sanitation in similar challenging context?
xii. If you face the challenge in the future, what would you want to do differently in terms of planning, implementation and financing?

2.2: Guide for Key informant Interview with Life Empowerment Foundation (Civil Society Organization)
i. How can you describe your collaboration with UP in the RUSHPIN programme?
ii. Describe your job role and responsibility in the process of delivering Belegete village to ODF?
iii. Tell us about your experience working in Becheve ward?
iv. Why did you accept to work in the ward despite the tough terrain challenges?
v. Describe your experience working in Belegete village?
vi. What are the approaches/strategies adopted to overcome the terrain challenges?
vii. How are these strategies different from the conventional ones?
viii. Was there collaboration with other partners in the LGA to reach Belegete village? If yes, how?
ix. Did the peculiarity of Belegete village affect your reporting?
x. What was the community’s response to the programme?
xii. What was the result achieved?
xiii. What really worked? Why did you think so?
xiv. What mistakes were made? What lessons can be drawn from that?
xv. What is the sustainability plan?
xvi. If you could change one thing about that approach, what could that be?
xvii. What was the greatest obstacle in supporting Belegete to reach ODF?

2.3: Guide for Key informant Interview with WASH Coordinator
i. What was your role in the RUSHPIN programme and Obanliku in particular?
ii. Why was Becheve ward the last to be triggered in the LGA? What were the peculiar challenges in implementing CLTS in Belegete?
iii. Tell us about your experience working with Life Empowerment Foundation in Becheve ward?
iv. Describe your experience working with Life Empowerment Foundation in Belegete village?
v. What kind of support was given to Life Empowerment Foundation to overcome the terrain challenges?
vi. How was the support different from other CSOs and wards?
vii. Did the peculiarity of Belegete village affect your reporting?
viii. What was the result achieved?
ix. What is the sustainability plan?
x. What really worked? Why did you think so?
xii. What mistakes were made? What lessons can be drawn from that?
xiii. If you could change one thing about that approach, what could that be?
xiv. What was the greatest obstacle in supporting Belegete to reach ODF?
2. 4: Guide for Key informant Interview with Local Task Group on Sanitation (LTGS)

i. What was your role in the RUSHPIN programme and Obanliku in particular?
ii. Tell us about your support and collaboration with the LGA authority/WASH Unit and Traditional Rulers
iii. How did this support and collaboration help in delivering programme goal in Belegete village?
iv. How did the LTGS perform their role of verifying ODF claims in Belegete given the difficulty in accessing the community?
v. How did the LTGS support the State Task Group on Sanitation (STGS) in performing its role in certification of ODF status in Belegete?
vi. If there are things that could change in your strategies of support to the WASH Unit, what could they be?
vii. What do you think is the key to successful implementation in Belegete? Why?
viii. What was the greatest obstacle in supporting Belegete to reach ODF?

2.5: Guide for Key informant Interview with Community Leaders

i. Tell us about your community; how you live and interact with other communities in the LGA.
ii. What would you say are the biggest challenges you face as a community?
iii. What do you know about the RUSHPIN programme and how did your community receive the programme?
iv. What were the challenges for the community to engage with / benefit from the programme?
v. Who was involved in supporting your community in this process?
vi. What strategies did you as community leaders use to ensure everyone was involved?
vii. Roles of major stakeholders in the process?
viii. How did you carry out the construction of toilets given the rocky nature of your soil?
ix. How has the result been sustained or otherwise?
x. How do you report your progress or changes to the LGA?
xi. Has there been further interventions as a result of engagement in the RUSHPIN Programme and achieving ODF?

2.6: Guide for Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with WASH Unit

i. Tell us about your collaboration with UP in delivering the RUSHPIN programme?
ii. Why was Becheve ward the last to be triggered in the LGA? What were the peculiar challenges in implementing CLTS in Belegete?
iii. Tell us about your collaboration with Life Empowerment Foundation
iv. How did this collaboration help in delivering improved sanitation in Belegete village?
v. How did you arrive at the new strategies for Belegete and why?
vi. Who was involved in delivering the new strategies?
vii. What has been done so far in Belegete and what was the result?
viii. How has this result been sustained?
ix. Have there been further interventions as a result?
x. What were the communication strategies adopted between the office and the community to track changes?

xi. If there are things that could change in your strategies to reach remote communities, what could they be?

2.7 Guide for Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with WASHCOM

i. Tell us about your community; how you live and interact with other communities in the LGA.

ii. Tell us what you know about the RUSHPIN programme

iii. How did the community receive the programme?

iv. What were the challenges encountered in implementing it in your community?

v. How did you become WASHCOM members and what was the motivation?

vi. Who was involved in supporting your community in this process?

vii. What strategies did the community use to ensure everyone was involved?

viii. Roles of major stakeholders in the process?

ix. How did you source materials needed for construction?

x. What was done to ensure all households have access to improved sanitation? Was it successful?

xi. How has the result been sustained or otherwise?

xii. How do you report your progress or changes to the LGA?

xiii. Has there been further interventions as a result?

xiv. What would be your advice to communities experiencing such challenges as yours with regard to improving and sustaining sanitation?

2.8 Guide for Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with Women Groups

i. Tell us about your community; how you live and interact with other communities in the LGA.

ii. How does the difficult terrain impact the women specifically?

iii. Tell us what you know about the RUSHPIN programme

iv. How did the community receive the programme?

v. What were the challenges encountered in implementing it in your community?

vi. Who was involved in supporting your community in this process?

vii. What was the role of women in the process?

viii. How did you source materials needed for construction?

ix. How has the result been sustained or otherwise?

x. What would be your advice to communities experiencing such challenges as yours with regards to improving sanitation?

2.9 Guide for Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with Youth Groups

i. Tell us about your community; how you live and interact with other communities in the LGA.

ii. Tell us what you know about the RUSHPIN programme

iii. How did the community receive the programme?

iv. What were the challenges encountered in implementing it in your community?

v. Who was involved in supporting your community in this process?

vi. What strategies did you as community youths use to ensure everyone was involved?

vii. What were the roles of youths and other major stakeholders in the process?
viii. How did you source materials needed for construction?
ix. How has the result been sustained or otherwise?
x. What would be your advice to communities experiencing such challenges as yours with regard to improving sanitation?