

8 The development of an entertainment education program to promote handwashing with soap among primary school children in Vietnam

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Context

The Vietnam Handwashing Initiative aims to reduce disease and mortality in children through a communications program to promote handwashing with soap among caretakers of children under five and among primary school children aged six to ten years. Vietnam is one of four countries within the Water and Sanitation Program's (WSP) Global Scaling-Up Handwashing Project funded by

the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which focuses on learning how to apply innovative promotional approaches to behaviour change to generate widespread and sustained improvements in handwashing with soap at scale among women of reproductive age (ages 15-49) and primary school-aged children (ages 5-9). The project is currently being implemented in Peru, Senegal, Tanzania, and Vietnam by local and national

governments with technical support from WSP. In Vietnam, the program is supported by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education and Training, and the main implementing partner is the Vietnam Women's Union.

To help children improve their hygiene habits, the Vietnam Handwashing Initiative developed a children's campaign that includes both: (1) a national mass media campaign targeting children, and (2) a school-based interpersonal communication activities campaign with Youth Union members and teachers. The development of the children's campaign began in July 2008 with research in rural and semi-urban schools. The campaign itself was started in August 2009 at the beginning of the new school year.

Campaign development process

Formative research

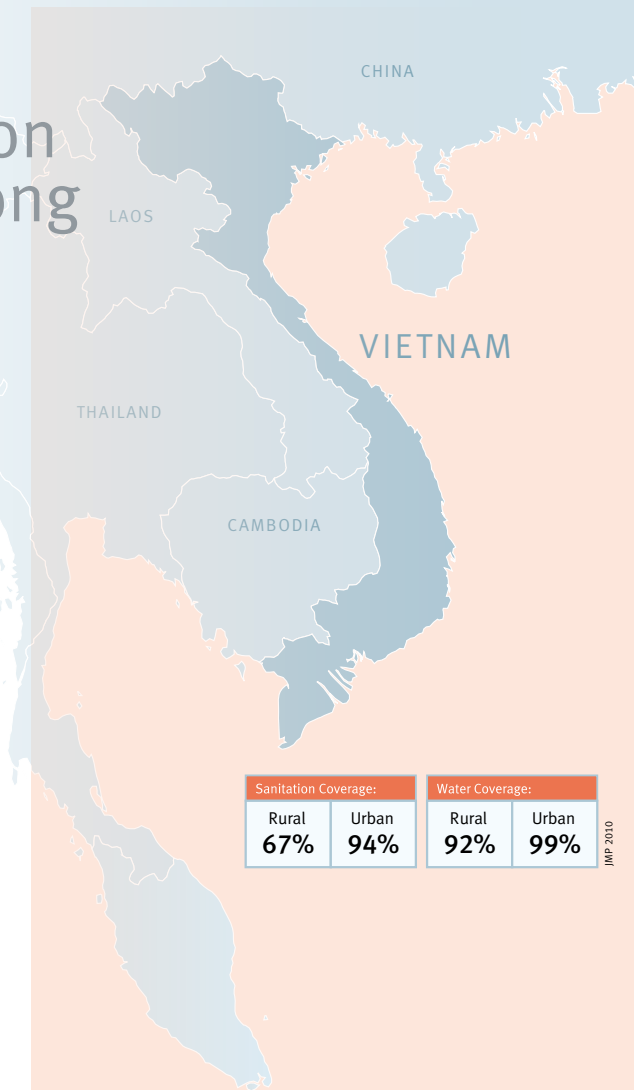
The research aimed to understand the school and home context where handwashing promotion will take place. In the school, this included social dynamics, roles and responsibilities of staff members, a typical school day, and access to water, sanitation and soap. The research also aimed to gain insight into the minds and realities of children aged six to ten to better understand the barriers and motivations to washing hands with soap.



This is one of the most effective programs we have carried out in our school - Headmaster, Nghe An province

Nghe An Women's Union facilitate a handwashing activity with local children

NGHE AN WOMEN'S UNION



Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the teachers, students and families who gave us their time and provided insight to the lives of primary school children in Vietnam. I would also like to thank the Vietnam Women's Union who helped to facilitate the study and to the researchers who helped develop the innovative tools. And finally, to my WSP colleagues who have helped in the development of the children's program and in reviewing this paper including Minh Thi Hien Nguyen, Lam Xuan Dinh, Jacqueline Devine, Almud Weitz, and Amy Lynn Grossman.

Six primary schools were purposely chosen from three provinces to represent northern, central and southern regions of Vietnam. In each province, one peri-urban and one rural area were chosen. The age for primary school in Vietnam is from six to eleven, equivalent to grades one to five. Experience in research with primary school children in Africa showed that it can be difficult to draw out information from very young primary school children. Therefore, it was decided that the research team would interview children mainly from grades four and five (9-10 years old), although younger children were included in one exercise (Motivator Pictures). Roughly 30 students in total participated in each of the research methods below with the exception of the Motivator Pictures exercise where younger children were invited to join a total of 42 students. Eighteen students were included in the Belief Interviews, which were then followed by observations of sanitation and handwashing facilities in the children's homes.

Research methods

- *Family structure diagrams* were developed by each child to learn about the social relationships within the child's household and how those relationships might affect children's ability to wash hands with soap. This method used pictures where the child (shown at the centre of the paper) drew lines to the person in the home they were closest to, spent the most time with, feared most, and so on. The nature of the relationships was shown using different lines or by attaching a note to each of the figures. After the activity, the researchers could look at a child's paper and understand the family relationships based on the length, colour and thickness of the lines between the child and family member.
- *Daily diaries* were used to learn about what children do from morning to evening. Drawings of two clocks (one for morning, one for afternoon/evening hours) were used for children to fill in activities that they did for each hour(s) per day. This was done as a group exercise to get a sense, overall, of what children generally do each day. Daily diaries were developed for both summer holidays and school days as children's activities tended to differ depending on whether they attended school or not.
- A series of *Motivation Pictures* showing various handwashing scenes were presented to children and they were asked to tell a story based on how they interpreted the pictures. The objective was to understand the emotional driver for washing hands such as disgust, morality, shame, regret, and so on.
- Students were asked to name their favourite *role models*, the reasons for their

admiration and to list the careers they wanted. This helped to understand who children look up to, why and what children want to be as adults. Children were asked to write down their own answers. Pile sorting and voting were then used to find group agreement on the most admired people, why these were admired, and on the most desirable careers.

- *Belief interviews* were conducted with individual students to understand what children believe are the benefits to washing hands with soap, the causes of diarrhoea, and so on.
- *In-depth interviews and focus group discussions* with headmasters and teachers were carried out to understand the school's organisation, including teacher workloads, roles and responsibilities of staff, and the connections between the school and home, among others.
- *Direct observations* were made of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in both schools and homes to understand access and availability of water and soap.

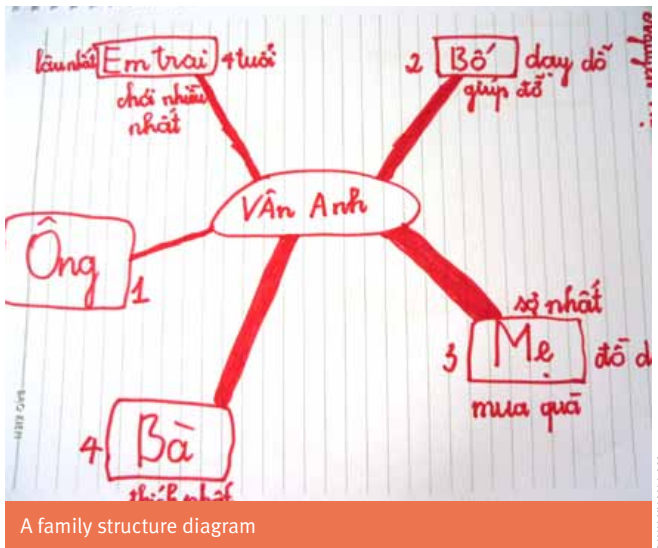
Summary of research findings

- Children know that they need to wash their hands with soap but do not know when.
- Smell is the most striking quality of soap for children.
- Fathers and mothers are equally feared by children. Children spend the most time playing with their brothers and sisters. Grandmothers had an important influence in the home where they were present.
- The desire to prevent others from getting sick (especially younger brothers and sisters) is a leading motivation for handwashing with soap.

- The Ho Chi Minh Pioneers' Union (national children's organisation) is a desirable group to belong to. They meet before class once a week to organise after-school activities and are led by one teacher from the school.
- Role models are people who reflect important values in the society: education, hard work and altruism (unselfish caring for the welfare of others).
- School days are long and highly regimented with limited opportunities for play.
- Teachers have a full load and handwashing with soap is already part of the curriculum.
- Hygiene lessons are often limited to theory. A lack of facilities prevents children from practicing handwashing with soap at many schools.
- There is very little access to soap (and sometimes water and sanitation) in schools.
- Management of soap is also a major challenge in schools with handwashing facilities.
- The most likely time to wash hands with soap in schools is after using the toilet because almost all rural school children return home to eat their midday meal.
- TV is a child's window to wider society (Le, Duong, & Aunger, 2008).

Developing a behaviour change framework

In an ideal situation, a behaviour change framework would help to guide the research. In 2007, WSP developed a framework for WSP program managers of the Global Scaling-Up Handwashing Project, titled FOAM (Coombes & Devine, 2009). The framework provided a way to analyse the determinants or factors that can help or hinder handwashing with



A family structure diagram

soap behaviour, such as access to soap, beliefs regarding the cause of diarrhoea, and so on. FOAM stands for:

Focus: who are target audiences and what is the behaviour we want them to adopt?

Opportunity: is the target audience able to carry out the behaviour?

Ability: is the target audience capable of carrying out the behaviour?

Motivation: does the target audience want to carry out the behaviour?

After analysing the research findings in Vietnam using this FOAM framework, the objectives of the communication campaign were selected. After the campaign, children in semi-urban and rural school ages six to ten will:

- know that even clean-looking and clean-smelling hands can have germs;
- believe that handwashing with water alone is not enough – soap is needed;
- believe that handwashing with soap is an important practice to demonstrate in front of friends and family because good handwashing will protect themselves, their family and friends;
- be motivated to wash their hands with soap at two critical times (before eating and after using the latrine); and
- be motivated and feel excited about handwashing with soap and want to practice it.

Campaign development

The research findings revealed that altruism (unselfish caring for the welfare of others) is highly valued by children as well as the desire to protect their younger brothers and sisters from illness. Thus, the campaign for children

was based on the theme of children as the “pride of the family”. Handwashing with soap was positioned as an easy, fun and smart behaviour with a tagline of “Wash your hands with soap for your own health and the health of others around you”.

Due to the fact that Vietnamese children have little free time in their daily lives, WSP supported its partners to work with an advertising agency to develop a program using an entertainment/education approach that would generate interest, enthusiasm and promote the practice of handwashing with soap. As a result, a campaign with colourful, attractive and positive characters was developed around a superhero that gets special powers by handwashing with soap in order to help his family and others. This was tested with two different characters: a cartoon rabbit character and another, more realistic rural school boy, Bi, who becomes a superhero. The character of Bi was more acceptable to children, and was further refined and pretested again several times before the final production.

Rather than a top-down education approach, the campaign combined mass media and interpersonal communications activities. A series of ten cartoon strips was printed in the weekly national children’s “Youth” magazine beginning in September 2009. These were made into animated cartoons shown on a popular nightly children’s television show “Goodnight Baby” beginning in March 2010. In addition, popular children’s games were modified for use in schools along with singing of the “Five Clean Fingers” song used in the program for mothers and grandmothers. Simple guidelines and an instructional DVD were made for training teachers about how to play the games as an addition to existing lessons on handwashing with soap. Each

school within the program areas will carry out five extracurricular activities throughout the year including participating in a national handwashing drawing contest through the “Youth” magazine.

Program implementation

Activities to promote handwashing with soap have been carried out in 512 rural and semi-urban schools throughout Vietnam, through May 2010. Activities that have been completed thus far include:

- Bi comic strips aired in ten consecutive editions of “Youth” magazine;
- Bi animated cartoons aired on “Goodnight Baby” every Saturday evening for ten weeks;
- Handwashing content integrated into five shows of “Goodnight Baby”;
- National handwashing drawing contest completed with over 2000 submissions nationwide;
- Training for over 670 teachers;
- 260 “My Superhero” contests;
- Over 1000 Global Handwashing Day school events in 2008 and 2009; and
- 512 school Handwashing with Soap launch events and four additional school-based events per school.

Over 10,000 students have been reached thus far through the school program and an estimated 630,000 children have been reached via the mass media program.

To deal with the lack of handwashing facilities at schools, guidance on developing low-cost handwashing stations is provided to teachers and headmasters during the training courses. Rather than waiting for large-scale investments to improve their water and sanitation facilities,

teachers, headmasters or the parents associations can purchase plastic buckets and plastic water dippers which are inexpensive and available for purchase anywhere in Vietnam for immediate use in schools. Teachers are advised to put soap bars inside loosely woven fabrics such as mesh so that the soap remains inside a container at all times and can be more easily managed.



Students playing “catch the dirty hand” game

Lessons learned

Several of the key lessons learned thus far have to do with keeping the quality high in the design and implementation of a behaviour change communications campaign. Below are the main lessons learned and recommendations that may be helpful for managers in developing behaviour change programs.

- Policy makers and program managers are often under pressure to quickly roll out a communications campaign, especially if they lack time or financial resources. Thus they may be tempted to skip or shortcut

These activities are really fun and I get to play them with lots of my friends - Student, Dong Thap Province



Teachers carrying out games with students at school

DINH XUAN LAM

the consumer research stage. However, based on our experience in Vietnam, this first step is the most important in designing a campaign. The research findings are very important for identifying the factors that determine behaviour and are used to make the campaign objectives. The campaign objectives will then be used as the basis for monitoring and evaluation.

- Research tools need to be developed that can uncover the individual, family and larger society factors that may help or stop people from washing hands with soap. This includes knowing the distance, on average, between the latrine and the handwashing area, understanding who within the household (mother or father) can buy soap or who is in charge of or manages soap in households and schools (adults or children), and so on.
- The normal research tools used with adults such as focus group discussion and in-depth interviews may not give enough

useful insight needed as many children easily get bored with questions and are easily influenced by the responses of their friends. Thus, research activities need to be varied, participatory and fun. Children should be allowed to take the lead in drawing the family structures, daily diaries, and so on. Pictures are a useful and easy way to get information and start discussion, particularly from less outspoken children.

- During brainstorming activities, it may be better to ask children to list only their top three choices (three most desirable careers, for example) rather than listing all of their ideas. This makes the pile sorting and prioritising easier for children. During the voting, it was often necessary to ask children to close their eyes and vote to reduce the influence of the more outspoken students.
- During pretesting, it is crucial to test at least two different campaign ideas (such as the rabbit and the boy superheroes). This ensures that audiences are provided a chance to respond to alternative concepts rather than only making comments on variations of the same concept. Ideally, there should be at least two rounds of pretesting. The first round helps to determine which concept to further develop and the second round is used to fine-tune the concept including working, layout, colour, and so on. We had to carry out at least three rounds of pretesting in developing the campaign.
- Research and pretesting should be done by an experienced person who has worked with children before and who can turn the discussion into an activity or game to help keep the children's attention. Discuss the

key ideas you would like the children to provide feedback on and let them tell you the story of what they see from your creative ideas.

- Timing is crucial. Start early when children are attentive and alert. Limit each group activity to one hour including a short break.
- To build on the private sector's experience in designing appealing advertising campaigns, an international advertising agency was contracted to design the children's campaign. Advertising agencies do not always base their creative ideas on evidence and research data. The advertising agency was given the results of the children's research, as well as guidelines. However the agency did not use these fully. Although the creative ideas looked good, WSP and its partners often had to supervise closely so that the creative ideas reflected the research findings. The directions given to the agency are an important tool to guide and measure the creative ideas of the agency. Although a creative concept may be very attractive, if it does not reflect the requirements of the brief, it should be sent back to the agency. It is important to state clearly and exactly what the agency will be measured against and then to hold the firm accountable.

Conclusion

WSP's experience in supporting the Ministry of Health and the Vietnam Women's Union to implement the Vietnam Handwashing Initiative has demonstrated that there is a need and demand for behaviour change communications that use varied approaches to improve hygiene in Vietnam. The health and education ministries have endorsed all

the communication products from the campaign. Teachers and school administrators have been particularly keen to include within their schools the informal and participatory games developed for children. In addition to national institutions, WSP has responded to requests for support from provincial health and education departments as well as from several World Bank investment projects in water and sanitation to integrate handwashing into their existing programs. Most recently, in December 2009, the Vietnam Women's Union signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the World Bank agreeing to mainstream handwashing activities into the Women's Union program within all 63 provinces in Vietnam without additional financial support from WSP. From 2010 until the end of 2011, the Handwashing Initiative will focus its efforts on expanding the children's program by training provincial Departments of Education and Training and provincial mass organisations in provinces that were not in the program. This is part of the effort to build an enabling environment where handwashing with soap activities can be continued even after project funds cease.

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