



CLEAN HANDS, CLEAN WATER, AND BETTER HEALTH

A low-tech plastic container cuts waterborne disease for families struggling to eat in Senegal

BY CHRIS HUFSTADER

Kologan Dangnokho, 22, is like any young mother: She struggles to keep her children well fed and healthy. On this day, she says it has been months since her young daughters (1 and 3 years old) have had any stomach-aches or diarrhea. "Each month they were sick, with fevers and diarrhea," she says, standing next to her small home in the center of her Senegalese village, Yongoya. Now, she says, "We use the tippy-tap, when we come from using the toilet." She nods toward a plastic container suspended between two vertical sticks, next to her home. "I don't see my children sick anymore, so I'm really happy."

The tippy-tap is a low-tech system for washing hands in a place with no running water. It's just a plastic jug with a hole poked in it. You fill the jug with water, attach

a string to the top, and tie the string to one end of a stick near the ground. You step on the stick to pull the string, it tips the container, and water dribbles out of the hole on to your hands. With a little soap, you can wash your hands after going to the bathroom, before eating, or when you clean up after a baby.

Oxfam provided tippy-taps for 720 families in 47 villages in the Kédougou region in southeastern Senegal as part of our emergency assistance for people enduring a serious food shortage after the nearly nonexistent 2011 harvest. Farmers in Yongoya, an isolated village with about 175 people, were in a fairly typical situation: Their harvest of maize (corn), groundnuts (peanuts), and *fonio* (a local variety of millet) was meager, and over the winter they consumed all the food they grew in 2011. In 2012, they were out of money, out of food, and struggling

to plant. Oxfam assisted farmers in this area with cash grants they could use to buy food during the growing season, typically a lean time for families that have invested all their assets into their fields.

EVADING WATERBORNE DISEASE

Oxfam also provided hygiene kits containing soap and bleach to all those receiving cash as a means to help them reduce their vulnerability to waterborne diseases. Evading this type of illness is especially important for malnourished people who need to take in and absorb as much nutrition as possible. They may be weak and unable to fight off diseases. A bad case of diarrhea can be devastating, particularly for children under 5. Each family receiving a cash grant also got the components of a tippy-tap, which families installed near their homes.

ABOVE: A young girl uses a tippy-tap near her home in Yongoya in southeastern Senegal. The tippy-tap is a simple, low-cost device that helps people with no running water in their homes keep their hands clean, and thus reduce their vulnerability to diseases. *Holly Pickett / Oxfam America*



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A local organization in southeastern Senegal called *Association Kédougou Action Développement* (Kédougou Association for Action and Development, or AKAD) distributed hygiene kits for Oxfam. AKAD also trained local people to show families how to set up their tippy-tap and how to treat drinking water with bleach. Oxfam also worked with other groups in the southern region of Kolda, where we distributed more than 2,000 tippy-taps and hygiene kits.

In addition to working on water and sanitation in emergencies, Oxfam supports long-term efforts to improve irrigation for farmers and water for livestock in Ethiopia, and to maintain drainage channels to reduce vulnerability to flooding in Haiti. Oxfam also works with communities advocating to protect their water resources from pollution in areas affected by mining in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

NEW HABITS FOR BETTER HEALTH

There are no latrines in Yongoya, nor are there any wells. Dangnokho gets her water from a nearby stream. When she received her hygiene kit, staff hired by AKAD trained her to filter the water through a cloth to strain out things such as guinea worm eggs, which if ingested can grow inside the body and then painfully exit through the skin. She also learned how to treat the water with a capful of bleach. She now keeps the water container clean and covered, and she also uses one cup for scooping water out of the container and another for drinking, to avoid contaminating the water supply.



Kologan Dangnokho filters water from a nearby stream prior to treating it with bleach. She says that since she started treating her water and using the tippy-tap to keep her family's hands clean, her young daughters are not suffering from stomach ailments as they used to. *Holly Pickett / Oxfam America*

AKAD engaged Yongoya resident Malan Camara, 32, to train villagers there. He says that decreasing the incidence of waterborne disease cuts down on health care expenses, as seeking medical care requires crossing the Gambia River and traveling 20 miles to the regional capital, Kédougou. "It's really a problem to get across the river, especially in the rainy season," Camara says.

But Camara says that since he has distributed hygiene kits and set up the tippy-taps, things changed in the village for the better: The chief of Yongoya even goes so far as to say that there is no more diarrhea at all in the village. Camara just says, "I'm really proud, we've never had a program like this here, and I feel like we were suffering in

darkness, and now we are climbing out of a hole into the light."

Camara says the real test of the success of a hygiene promotion program is whether people continue the good practices they have adopted after the program stops. "We've changed people's behavior, and they will continue," he says. "I just hope people will have the money to buy soap," which is fairly expensive: 60 cents for a nine-ounce bar in local markets.

Dangnokho says she is not going back to the old days of children sick with diarrhea. "I'll continue to use bleach and soap after AKAD stops giving it to us," she says definitively. "I will afford to buy it. I'll manage."



ABBIE TRAYLER-SMITH / OXFAM

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Access to clean water and sanitation is a basic human right. That's why Oxfam works with communities to ensure they have clean water and a sanitary means to dispose of waste. During emergencies we also promote good hygiene to reduce vulnerability to disease. You can read more about Oxfam's work in emergency water and sanitation, our irrigation projects, and our support for communities in protecting their water resources from pollution on our web site: oxfamamerica.org/water.



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