

Awareness alone is not enough!



The SODIS method protects men, women and particularly children reliably from diarrhoeal diseases caused by the consumption of contaminated drinking water. To further enhance the impact of our SODIS promotion programs, it is important to identify the most successful promotion approaches and tools for knowledge dissemination and behavior change communication in the target communities. Two social psychologists, Andrea Tamas and Silvie Krämer of the University of Zurich, have investigated the effectiveness of different promotion strategies in field studies in Bolivia and Zimbabwe and obtained a series of important results.

Research results as stepping-stones

Regular application is the key to achieving maximum health benefits from the SODIS method. Awareness of the interdependence between drinking water quality and health, and instructions on how to apply the SODIS method, can be conveyed to target water users quite easily. Ensuring that the people use this knowledge to produce safe drinking water every day and for all family member is much more difficult. Our challenge is to turn SODIS application into a habit, much like brushing your teeth in the morning. After the initial trial period, the method must become an integral part of the water users' daily routine.

Promoters are the key to success

The research results obtained by the social psychologists very clearly substantiated the importance of motivated and well trained local promoters in achieving a sustainable behavior change. Survey data revealed that only 10% of the participants intended to use the SODIS method regularly

after just hearing about the practice at one-time information events. Professional promoters achieved a far greater effect in terms of interest and actual application of the SODIS method. These promoters are instructors trained in the application of SODIS who assist target families over a longer time period. They check the availability of soap and PET bottles in the households, make sure that the SODIS method is used correctly and regularly, and are available to discuss issues relating to drinking water treatment and hygiene. In the study areas, more than half of the families trained by promoters became SODIS users.

Habit-forming strategies

To turn the SODIS method into a daily ritual, our local project partners use locally adapted reminders, such as colourful posters, SODIS calendars or table tent cards, which encourage application of the SODIS method. These reminders are often an eye-catcher in people's homes and make SODIS

visible in the household. The data collected by the social psychologists indicate the great effectiveness of such promotion tools, contributing to a long-term use of the SODIS method.

Public self-commitment is another habit-forming measure. Families who are convinced by the SODIS method and apply it consistently show their commitment by affixing a sticker to their front door. This makes SODIS visible in the neighbourhood, turns it into a topic of conversation, and helps families sustain their commitment to use SODIS.

The results of this study confirm that our projects are on the right track: transfer of knowledge by professional promoters remains the most effective method of SODIS dissemination. We regularly translate new findings from research into our promotion activities on the ground and therefore get closer to our goal: "Clean Drinking Water for All".



The sticker on the wall reminds the family every morning to place the bottles in the sun. Tamil Nadu, India

The Nepali government supports SODIS

By Regula Meierhofer, Project Manager Nepal

About two years ago we launched the project «Partnership for Clean Drinking Water» in Nepal's southern lowland (Terai). In collaboration with our Nepalese partner organisation, ENPHO, we aimed to raise the awareness of the local population about the importance of clean drinking water in the areas around Bharatpur, Hetauda, Nepalgunj, Butwal, and Lalitpur. Some 12 000 families and countless school children in the Terai region have been trained in that application of various methods of household water treatment and safe storage. More than 70% of the trained families now regularly treat their drinking water with the SODIS



A health worker has just trained Mrs Gurung in the use of the SODIS method. Together they place the PET bottles on Mrs Gurung's roof.

method, ceramic filters or chlorination! In 13 zones of the project, every single family treats the drinking water before consumption.

This success improved the health of the population dramatically. The lack of access to safe drinking water – even tapwater is often contaminated – is the main cause for developmental disturbances and mortality among children in Nepal. Some 13 000 children die from diarrhoea every year in this country.

The implementation framework of the project is characterised by a close cooperation with the respective municipal and local authorities. Public health workers play a pivotal role in the promotion work on the ground. For the training of the target population, we created easily understandable information materials showing various methods for drinking water treatment. The health workers used these materials to train the water users. Besides trainings and follow up at community level, the project also ensured smooth operation of the supply chains for required products and materials (PET bottles for the SODIS method, ceramic filters, and chlorine drops).

Drinking water treatment and hygiene training now also form part of the official curriculum in schools and are taught with teaching materials especially developed by the project. 82 schools set up «stations» for drinking water treatment, where school children learn to apply different methods of water treatment. Diarrhoeal illnesses have since then declined markedly and the children are far less frequently absent from school.



SODIS on Facebook

Do you want to get frequent updates on ongoing activities related to SODIS? Would you like to be in touch with other people who actively support SODIS? Visit our webpage www.sodis.ch and our new fanpage on Facebook.



As public health workers and schools contribute significantly to the dissemination of the SODIS method, we are always seeking the cooperation of public institutions. In Kenya, Nepal and Pakistan, our efforts are starting to bear fruit. We now want to replicate this success also in other countries.

SODIS villages defy cholera

By Valérie Cavin, Project Manager Congo

In the 1990s, the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland, for the first time examined the health impact related to the application of the SODIS method. The study carried out in Kenya revealed that 86% of cholera cases could be avoided when the people treated their drinking water with the SODIS method.



Surface water is highly polluted with fecal pathogens. By applying the SODIS method, water becomes safe to drink.

Since 2007, SODIS and the Anglican Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been implementing a health programme in the region of North Kivu. Three quarters of the population in this region have no access to safe drinking water. Cholera and other diarrhoeal illnesses are widespread. The promotion of the SODIS method as part of the Anglican church's health programs soon showed positive results in combating cholera.

According to our Congolese partners, hardly any cholera cases are being reported from villages using the SODIS method, e.g. in the Kasindi Port area. Villages in the same region where the SODIS method is not being applied (Kasindi Lubriria) regularly experience recurrent incidences of cholera. Similar reports from Zambia and Zimbabwe also confirm the effectiveness of the SODIS method in decreasing cholera incidence in user communities.

These success stories have aroused great interest in the SODIS method among local NGOs, international agencies, but also governments.



SODIS in a disaster area

Devastating rains in Guatemala in June and July 2010 claimed the lives of at least 300 people, and caused a widespread destruction of harvest and infrastructure. Since then, 100 000 people have been living in makeshift accommodations. The risk of epidemic outbreaks is high. The Ministry of Public Health has decided to promote water disinfection at household level (boiling, chlorination and SODIS) in the affected regions. The initiative is backed by UNICEF and the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO).



Networks in Togo

In order to achieve a nationwide dissemination of the SODIS method, we have begun to create a network of local and international NGOs based in Togo. Each of these NGOs spread the SODIS method in a particular region. The NGOs exchange information and experience in regular meetings, and thereby improve their promotion activities. Our partner organisation 2AD coordinates the network activities.



Improved health in Uganda

Recent numbers from the public health authority of Kisoro, Uganda, document the positive impact of SODIS application on people's health and wellbeing. Diarrhoea rates have markedly declined since the introduction of the SODIS method along with hygiene improvement measures. The number of severe cases of diarrhoea in SODIS villages declined from 972 in 2007 to 276 in 2009. In some hospitals, the capacity of the departments treating diarrhoea patients could be reduced, and resources could be freed for the treatment of other illnesses.