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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: Mrs. Ma Yansheng NIGERIA DATE: 26 July 1983

FROM: Maggie Black FILE NO.: MB/83/228

SUBJECT: Article on Imo State Water Project

Many thanks for your memorandum of 12 July. I'm glad that you liked the article overall, and I appreciate the time and trouble you have taken to provide your comments. I should say at the outset, however, that to make textual changes at this juncture would be extremely difficult and rather expensive, given the advanced stage of the production process of this issue of UNICEF NEWS. The issue, incidentally, is already well over a month late, and I am hesitant to cause any further delay.

I did send a copy of the article to Richard Reid in Lagos, and I feel that if there were a major error of fact, or a major political problem to face, he would have cabled me. Those kinds of changes would, naturally, have to be made even at the very last stage before printing.

On your general comment number one that the article gives the impression that UNICEF is "hero", I do have to agree with you that this is an undesirable impression. However, much as we might like it to be otherwise, this is the fact. Everywhere I went, and everyone I spoke to, particularly village leaders and VBWs, spoke of UNICEF in just the way you are describing, as the "hero". I think it is very important that we face the reality of people's perceptions - which is an underlying theme of the whole article - rather than subtly alter what they think and say to match more closely the way we would wish things were going on. For this reason, I do not feel I can alter any of the phrases that were used by the villagers in this connection.

To take the point somewhat further: I think it is unarguable that the way the programme has been designed and is being carried out is exclusively attributable to UNICEF, and that the government would never have done the programme in this way. I think the question raised is a fundamental one in considering the relative roles of government and funding/assisting organizations. The degree of UNICEF's involvement in this programme is

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both a cause of its success, and the reason why the programme is probably not replicable by government alone. I chose not to make any such point in the article itself, but to any intelligent reader the inference is there, and they would be right to reach that conclusion.

On your second point, regarding the element of community participation, I feel that the way I have described all the various teams and their activities on the ground fully indicates the importance attached to "community participation". I do tend to avoid the use of buzz words and phrases, such as "community participation", partly because they sound like jargon and partly because it is often unclear precisely what is meant. My understanding of the activities of the mobilization team is as I described: the holding of meetings in the villages and the pre-selection of VBWs. If there are other activities, I did not witness them, but perhaps we could make good of this omission in the context of the film.

As regards women's participation, I agree that perhaps a stronger statement could have been made on this aspect. However, I think it is clear that quite a reasonable proportion of the VBWs are women, and that all the steering committees include women members. I actually felt that the real role played by women on the steering committees might not be very profound: I think the fact that the women had to go to the fields and work, whereas the men could take the day off from their farms to attend the village meeting, was quite indicative. Traditionally, women do not have decision making roles in village councils and it would surprise me if this fact were not reflected in the way the steering committees go about their business. The only people in the traditional power structure who can really provide solid endorsement to the programme activities, in a way that communities will respond to, are the chiefs and ezes, who are men by definition.

On "the vexed question of compensation for VBWs". I respect that you would have preferred the emphasis to be the other way around, and that I would have brought up front the point that villages are compensating their VBWs before stressing the problems encountered. However, on the basis of all the discussions I had with training team members and with village based workers themselves, my clear impression is that this problem is very pervasive, and that examples of compensation being given are very much the exception rather than the rule. This problem is not unique to Ukwa: it is already happening in

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Ohaozara, even while the teams are still there and in the space of only a few months since training was completed. I don't feel the project will collapse because of this problem, but because of the reason I stated in the article - that the VBWs do not belong in any recognizable category of functionaries having authority at village level - the problem of their recognition and status is a very real one, and needs to be addressed. I would even go so far as to say that this is a weakness inherent to the whole basic services strategy, a weakness which I had not previously appreciated in all its dimensions, perhaps because I rarely get the opportunity to spend so much time looking in detail at one project at village level.

I have promised Bill Hetzer that I will try and put together a proposed treatment for the Imo State film by mid-August.

Best wishes.

cc: M. Beyer
✓R. Tuluhungwa
B. Hetzer

2243

Nigeria

Spreading the good news about water and sanitation

When God was putting water under the ground he overlooked Ohaozara, according to the people of this northeastern part of Imo State. Ohaozara is a place where, at the end of the dry season, the fear of cholera constantly threatens. Last October, UNICEF arrived with a drilling rig and many different teams of workers. In the words of a local chief: "Good water was struck from the rock to the surprise of all, and people were jubilating that UNICEF has come."

But while the people of Ohaozara marvelled at this technological miracle, the project teams were after a different kind of miracle: a change in deepset attitudes towards water use and waste disposal. Only this would ensure that the "water struck from the rock" could really be used to bring about a decline in diarrhoeal disease, worm infestation and in all the maladies that plague the lives of children and their families.

MAGGIE BLACK went to Ohaozara, and to other places where the Imo State Water and Sanitation Project is touching the lives of children. She spoke to government officials, project team members, village-based workers, and community leaders, and this is her - and their - account of what is happening.

Chief Awoke Obasi is a modern kind of chief. A large, energetic man, a schoolteacher by profession, he wears a polyester shirt and sunglasses, and rides a motorbicycle. But when he talks about the coming of water in Ohaozara, his language takes on a biblical flavour:

"For a long time the people have been suffering. They drink from ponds infested with disease. And when the dry season exceeds its time, there is no water at all, not even dirty water. In 1980, 200 people from the villages in Okposi in Ohaozara died from cholera.

"In 1977 I started to make appeals. I went to the government headquarters in Owerri, and said that they should give us even an outmoded well, no matter how old-fashioned it was. They said that since long they had been coming and going to Ohaozara, and trying all the possibilities, but that there is no water free from salt in all Ohaozara.

"Nobody knew that one day such a team as UNICEF would come. In October last year, they struck the first borehole, bringing good water to the surprise of all. People who thought that they can only get water from a swamp now knew that UNICEF can get water from a rock, and they were jubilating that UNICEF has come to save them from the menace of cholera and guinea worm.

"Here in Ohaozara the name of UNICEF is now indelible."

Before the momentous event which took place on 10 October 1982 on a rocky outcrop of sandstone in Okposi, the last time that good water was found in Ohaozara was in 1954. No wonder

that the miracle of "water from the rock" has since become part of local legend, endlessly retold.

It has been the subject of newspaper headlines, and many a sceptical technician has visited the place where the first India Mark II handpump was installed in triumphal splendour above two parallel stairways carved in the sandstone. Not surprisingly, government leaders and local politicians have been quick to lay claim to their part of the credit for a "miracle" which could transform the everyday lives of more than 75,000 villagers in Ohaozara.

Even if in the villages themselves some of the magic has rubbed off in the subsequent wrangles about the siting of boreholes in the villages and the order in which they are drilled, still Solomon Chima Nkwor, the Eze -- King -- of all Okposi in Ohaozara, will sit on his carved wooden throne, break the kolanut, and call for champagne to honour his "sons and daughters from the UNICEF".

Ohaozara is a remote and neglected region (officially, a Local Government Authority) of northeastern Imo State, the heart of Ibo land. There are few roads or services and government people strenuously resist serving in a rural backwater which has nothing to recommend it. The people of Ohaozara are "particular", it is said, different from other Ibo people, cut off and locked into the horizons of yams and cassavas they farm from sun-up to sun-down.

In such a place, even for the modern chief on a motor bicycle, the combined application of expert hydrogeology, the latest drilling equipment, and immaculate engineering skill,

produce an unimaginable result in an unimaginable time frame: one, or at most two, of those timelessly indistinct farming days.

The 51st borehole in Okposi

Today, the great yellow truck with its compressor, its water tank, and its drill at the back, has been wheedled and negotiated into a tricky position at the far edge of Okposi territory. Here, over a knob of sandstone in the middle of the track to Enogorugu village, the lumbering machinery has been raised on its hydraulic jacks. The air is filled with a stinging cloud of grey dust and rock chips, while the drill-bit screams and hammers its way into the ground.

An aquafer bearing enough water for a good handpump yield is struck at 75 feet. By tomorrow, the well will have been developed, and the handpump installed. Only the result of the water's chemical analysis stands between the people of Enogorugu and the use of their new water supply. If the water is pure, this will be the 39th successful borehole out of 51 to be drilled in Okposi.

The rig, its operators, and their spellbinding achievements never fail to attract a great crowd of onlookers: even Chief Obasi has appeared on his motorbike from the other end of Okposi to witness the spectacle. But to UNICEF, and to all those involved in the Imo State Rural Drinking Water and Sanitation Project, this moment of technological marvel is the easiest, almost the most mundane, part of the project process.

It involves the project's most expensive capital components, and their usage requires the highest of the scientific and technical skills at the project's command. But however brillant the hydrological accomplishment it represents, the "striking of water from a rock" will not on its own achieve a transformation in women and children's health, as water supply projects have shown time and again all over the world. Major health gains - a dramatic drop in childhood diarrhoea or worm infestation - cannot be won simply by improving the quality and quantity of water available to the community - which has after all its own justification; attitudes concerning its use must also be influenced in a decisive way.

What is unusual, if not unique, in the design of this water supply and sanitation programme is the degree to which the familiar rhetoric about the vital health education component has been translated into practice. Leaving aside capital costs in drilling equipment, the vast majority of the project's resources and managerial efforts have been directed not at impenetrable outcrops of sandstone, but at something even more immovable and opaque: the bedrock of fixed human values and attitudes about water and its use, and about how and where people deal with that most noxious and private substance, their bodily wastes.

The sequence of activities

The arrival of the drilling rig at Enogorugu village represents a final and climactic punctuation mark at the end of

a sequence of project activities which began weeks and months ago. The drilling of a borehole is the pay-off, the prize, provided when a village has demonstrated its willingness to question and begin to change deepset habits concerning water use and excreta disposal.

The sequence of project activities is imprinted not only on the plans, schedules, and reports which constitute the Imo State project's exhaustive literature. It is also imprinted on the minds of village leaders, those standard-bearers of new behaviour patterns, indicating that the idea of the programme process has already begun to percolate through the strata of village society.

Chief Obasi, the modern chief of Umuka village, describes the sequence: "UNICEF arrived with different teams, and the people of Umuka were very happy to see them. There was the enumeration team, and the mobilization team. Our people picked up interest, and they chose six persons to be trained as village-based workers, to be directing the members of the community on the intentions of the UNICEF officials.

"After the work of the mobilization team came the training team, and those six persons attended at the Polytechnic, and came back bringing the good news of water and sanitation. Then came the sanitation team, and finally the drilling team, and in this Umuka community the first borehole was struck."

The sequence of events described by Chief Obasi has an inherent purpose. It shows the villagers that UNICEF and its government partners mean what they say about preventive health, and entices them to begin to alter existing habits before the

arrival of the new water supply assuages their literal and metaphorical thirst. It also elicits community involvement from the outset. There are altogether about 70 members of the various teams, almost all of them seconded to the project from one state government ministry or another. They almost all spend most of their time with the people in the villages, endlessly reinforcing fragile links in the tangled skein of community relationships, through which the "good news about water and sanitation" might otherwise slip.

Adapting and re-adapting the programme "package"

What the project personnel have learned during that process of continuous encounter has enabled them to adapt and re-adapt all the intricate details of what is called the programme "package". This process of constant refinement, applied alike to questions as significant as where in the government structure final authority for the programme resides, and to details as minute as the phraseology to be used on a monthly report form for a village-based worker, has been integral to the programme from its inception.

The project was first launched in a different LGA called Ukwa, way to the south of Ohaozara, and worked its way there through three "autonomous communities" - the official name for a group of villages such as Okposi. Now that its activities are at different stages in three automous communities in Ohaozara - Okposi was the first - the various teams and the timing of their various tasks have all been synchromeshed and

calibrated to operate as smoothly and effectively as the "striking of water from the rock".

Just as the use of the drilling rig requires the highest technical expertise, this exercise has demanded the highest skills in human resources management. And the result is a programme design which is as finely-tuned as possible to the realities of rural life in Ibo land, and one which on paper, in practice, and in villagers' perceptions coincides to an unusual extent in rural development programmes in Africa.

At the moment that the borehole is being drilled in Enogorugu village at the far edge of Okposi, the first autonomous community, a range of other project activities are taking place simultaneously all over Ohaozara, all at their prescribed moment on the project's wheel. The mobilization team - the vanguard - is visiting a village in Isu, the third autonomous community to be reached, bringing "the good news of water", and screening the candidates selected by the village for training as their VBWs - village-based workers.

The training team is involved in two training exercises at different stages, one for VBWs already at work in the second autonomous community, Onicha, and one for newly-trained VBWs in the third, Isu. The environmental sanitation team is still haranguing and persuading villagers in the first, Okposi, to build improved pit-latrines or face the possibility that their new handpump will be disconnected.

The enumeration team, which is normally ahead of all the other teams but has a schedule not quite so tightly dovetailed with theirs, is counting households in a village in Isu prior

to carrying out a household survey, and is collecting the stools of children from a primary school for intestinal parasite analysis.

In the sequence: enumeration, mobilization, selection of VBWs, training of VBWS, training follow-up, environmental sanitation, and finally drilling and pump installation (some of which overlap anyway in any one village), it does happen that one team catches up its predecessor, or lags behind as the environmental sanitation team is now doing. Making the necessary adjustments in ways that do not cause the team members frustration, or leave them twiddling their thumbs in inactivity, is part of the human resources skills demanded of the project managers.

Harmonizing the rhythm

Their task is particularly sensitive as the rhythm of the project must harmonize as closely as possible with the rhythm of village life. The time-frame for the drilling of the borehole and pump installation at Enogorugu - two days - is known, as is the initial training period for the next batch of VBWs from Isu - two weeks. But when it comes to community investment and effort - such as that required for the building of a pit latrine - the time-frame is outside the control of any of the project staff.

Co-ordination is highly delicate, but to the extent that it can be, it is both disciplined and flexible. This does not prevent it running into snags. Eze Nkwor of all Okposi in

Ohaozara may sit on his wooden throne and drink a toast to his visitors from UNICEF. But it does not quench his outrage that drilling has proceeded in village X where no improved pit latrines have been constructed, before it has come to village Y where pit latrines are already in place, nor his private conviction that undue influence must have been brought to bear on a susceptible driller.

The explanation has to do with sandstone deposits, village boundaries, the need to keep a rig worth $250,000 in constant action, and to avoid zig-zagging Okposi's roadless terrain with cumbersome and sensitive drilling equipment according to a sequence of villages which makes no logistical sense. The eze is mollified by the news that the handpump in village Y will be disconnected if there is no rapid progress on pit latrine construction.

The activities of the three teams - mobilization, training, sanitation - most concerned with changing the villagers' behaviour towards how they collect water, how they store water, how they use water, and how they dispose of waste, particularly the bodily wastes which pose most risk to health, are all principally directed at putting in place a network of fully-trained VBWs - village-based workers. It is these men and women who will, it is hoped, continue to pursue the project's goals long after the teams, the rigs, the vehicles, and all the paraphernalia of UNICEF's presence in Ohaozara have moved elsewhere.

Just as the time-frame for one type of project activity - pit latrine construction - is inevitably much more elastic than

the time-frame for drilling or training, the time-frame for transforming people's deeply ingrained behaviour in intimate parts of their lives must be considerably longer than the weeks and months of the project staff's presence. The provision of water creates the circumstances in which that transformation can now be set in motion. But no matter how intense the project's water and sanitation blitzkreig, behavioural transformation can take years, even a generation, to accomplish fully.

Summoned by the town crier's gong

At Mgbalaeze village in Isu a great crowd has gathered together. It flows out of the community centre hall onto the surrounding verandah, where loudspeakers blare out music and an incomprehensible stream of exhortations, indicating that an occasion of importance is in train. These loudspeakers belong to the mobilization team's specially equipped Landrover, which is again visiting Mgbalaeze after a false start last week when the turnout was poor. Charles Ani, the village chairman and an active supporter of the programme, sent out the town crier with his gong on the previous evening to summon everyone for community labour, knowing that for such a summons few will dare escape their obligation.

Among the melée flowing backwards and forwards through the doors, half listening to the regulation speeches from the platform, are the candidates volunteering for selection as VBWs. Two members of the team, Joseph Eze and Godwin Oko, are

carrying out interviews in a corner of the verandah. The candidates must meet certain criteria: they must be settled members of the community, married, and preferably with children - there are odd cases of VBWs using their training to rush off to town and try for professional employment. And they must be able to read and write to a minimum standard, for they will need to fill out questionnaires, follow manuals, and submit reports on their activities.

A shy young woman, Felicia Onu, is propelled forward by her friends. She has come dressed in her best, but is intimidated by the interview, an unfamiliar experience for her but one that gives an impression of how outgoing she will later be in carrying out a role that depends upon her powers of persuasion. At first her instinctive reserve leads her to say that she is unmarried. Then, when she finds this eliminates her candidacy, she changes her mind.

Felicia is asked a string of questions: "Are you aware that UNICEF has come to this place to assist you to eradicate diseases? We want people to be trained, like they were in Okposi. Are you ready to help the people, as UNICEF helps the people? If you go for training, UNICEF will care for you, and when you return, your people will care for you. This work is not something you can finish in a short time. Do you want to go for training?" Felicia Onu replies simply: "Yes."

Then she is invited to read out, as a literacy test, the list of items she must bring to the Polytechnic on the appointed day: "Number eight, toilet soap. Number nine, packet of Omo. Number ten, a rubber sheet." Her voice is

faint but she doesn't often stumble. Felicia Onu is accepted. She smiles relief, but it is hard to know just how effectively she will serve Mgbalaeze: the test will come later, when she has finished her initial two weeks course, and training team members come and watch how she puts her new knowledge into action.

Meanwhile Charles Ani is giving a rousing speech from the platform inside the hall, punctuated by loud cheers and the sound of the town crier's gong commanding silence. "The god of Mgbalaeze is the god of Okposi and the god of UNICEF. It is well-known that wherever there is a water problem, UNICEF is there. This is a noble community work and our co-operation is assured." Charles Ani is also the chairman of the village steering committee for the project, a group of elders and men and women leaders to whom the VBWs will, once trained, become responsible.

Tying knots in the village fabric

The formation of the village steering committee, another function of the mobilization team, ties a knot in the mesh of the village's social fabric to help hold in the project "catch". If the VBWs in the village become demoralized because people won't do as they say they can turn to the steering committee for help. And it is the steering committee's responsibility to ensure that the VBWs are compensated for their work, by exacting community levies or decreeing free labour on the VBWs' farms.

At another village in Isu the steering committee is meeting for its first important session. The six VBWs from this village completed their two weeks training course at the Polytechnic along with around 50 others at the end of the previous week. Now the moment has come to introduce them to the steering committee and to give them a chance to show what they have learned.

In an open clearing under the shade of a huge tree whose spreading roots provide a perch for around 40 children consumed with curiosity, a table and benches have been set up. At the table are the village chairman, the secretary of the steering committee, and Philip Mwankwa of the training team. On the bench to one side are the four male VBWs; in front are the male steering committee members: all the women members have been obliged to go and work on their farms as this is the height of the planting season.

The meeting takes the form of a presentation by each of the VBWs in turn of one of the subjects he learned during the two residential weeks at the Polytechnic. Afterwards each answers questions posed by the steering committee members.

Philip Mwankwa first explains that the VBWs have been trained to educate the community "on health and environmental hazards, as well as the treatment of diarrhoea by oral rehydration salts." He says that the villagers should listen to any advice they may give, especially on referral of diseases to the health centre. He explains that, as a result of cholera and guinea worm in Ohaozara, an appeal was made to UNICEF by the government, and that UNICEF designed the programme.

"Now that the VBWs who volunteered have been trained, to be effective they need to be compensated. They need encouragement, they cannot go hungry and do their work well." He pleads with the steering committee to be alive to their responsibility, to make the activities of the VBWs in the village accepted and rewarded. Then he introduces each VBW by name.

Each VBW is fluent and recites his lesson well. Joseph Ofia is the first to speak: "Diarrhoea comes from infections, from dirt thrown about, from not washing your hands before eating, and from not covering food when it is being prepared. We are forgetting how flies contaminate our food. And we don't mind where we collect our water, we take it from ponds and streams, and we do not boil it, it is not well protected. We drink, and the result is we get cholera, we get guinea worm." These two infections are the most feared and hated in Ohaozara.

"The vegetables we eat, and the fruits, are not washed properly, and I suggest that we should purify the water, we should settle down the sediment. Before going to bed in the evening we should boil the water and allow it to cool down. Put it in a clean pot set aside for drinking. Cover it with a fitting lid, and use the 'two cup' system: use one cup to take the water from the pot, pour it into another cup to drink from, and keep the first cup on the water pot upside down to prevent it getting dirty."

When the first question comes, it is about diarrhoea. Joseph Ofia recites the recipe for home-made ORS, using an empty beer bottle as a measure, boiled water, a teaspoon of

salt and four lumps of sugar. "In the event of failure, the mother should go to the health centre."

The next VBW, Simon Nweke, talks about refuse and the disposal of excreta. "The community should be required to avoid throwing refuse about. All the refuse including empty cans and bottles should be collected. The grasses around the compound should be spread in the sunshine to dry, and then burned, as with calabashes, paper, and old clothes.

"Children and adults should be stopped going in the bush to pass stools. Before the improved pit latrine is introduced, the 'cat method' (covering the stool with earth) should be used. Decayed food, rotting food, and excreta attract flies. They carry infection back to the kitchen and in this way diseases spread."

A question comes from a distinguished-looking man in flowing robes and a cap, a member of the steering committee. "Why do people from developed countries bring in this message that the flies in our countries are sinners? Do the flies sin in their countries? Why do they ask us not to go in the bush?" Simon Nweke is a little nonplussed. "We know that flies are eaters of rotten food, and that what a fly cannot eat, a man cannot eat. We must know that flies are our enemies. We cannot kill all the flies, but we can protect ourselves from the damage they do us."

The meeting goes on for two hours or more. Then the new VBWs set off on a tour of village compounds. Sure enough, there are exposed foodstuffs in the kitchens, dirty paper and cans lying around outside, and waterpots with lids half off,

their contents open to the elements. Philip Mwankwa points condemningly to each infraction of "the news about water and sanitation".

The young VBWs shuffle nervously, their hands tightly clasped behind their backs. In the future they will have to point out "the sins of the flies" to elderly and distinguished heads of household, now sitting mesmerized by these goings-on at the doors of their yam barns. The full and daunting force of their new and perhaps unwelcome responsibilities is striking some of the VBWs for the very first time.

Rehearsing the songs for their graduation

At the Polytechnic in Okposi, other members of the training team are holding a one-week follow-up course for a group of around 45 VBWs from Onicha, the second Ohaozara autonomous community to be reached by the project. Each group's training takes place in three phases: the first is the two weeks' residential course which Felicia Onu will shortly attend; the second is a seven week phase in their villages, when each VBW is visited and his or her performance closely monitored by members of the training team. Then comes a final one-week course, back at the Polytechnic, where problems are discussed and clarifications given on matters that may not have been quite understood the first time around. After this the VBWs graduate, receiving their certificate at a special ceremony.

The Onicha VBWS are now, on the last day of their last residential session, rehearsing the songs they have composed

for the great day. Many of the Ibo songs, led by a single female voice, with the refrain coming from the whole stamping, rocking hall, are about the "news of water and sanitation". But in English they sing rousingly:

"UNICEF is for the children,
UNICEF is for the mothers,
UNICEF is for the people,
UNICEF is for the nation."

During their seven weeks' "practical" in their villages, the VBWs have kept diaries of their visits to the various compounds under their responsibility. All the details of how people collect water - whether in buckets, bowls, calabashes, or jerry cans which, with their closed stoppers are the most hygienic - and how they store it, are listed. So is their system of defecation: into a stream, behind a log, in a chamber pot or a pit latrine are the possibilities envisaged. There is a space for observations on cleanliness, and on the method of refuse disposal, and a list of 17 possible illnesses that the VBW may have encountered among the family members. For each compound visit, a diary must be filled in, including whether there was a follow-up visit and if any improvements had taken place.

One of the VBWs adding his voice to the chorus in rehearsel is Innocent Chukwu, a young man of 24 from the village of Anwuke. Innocent Chukwu has been a meticulous diary filler. He has received a high score from his trainer, 80 out of 100 possible points. His weakness appears to be community organization: he has not liaised successfully with his <u>eze</u> or

his chief to get the community working on market cleaning or on road mending. But Innocent Chukwu has made one mistake, which many others have also made. In the columns for cases of illness he has simply ticked "guinea worm" or "diarrhoea", without recording how many cases there were or whether they were among children or adults. This point has been given much emphasis in the week's discussions.

Innocent Chukwu has run into certain problems commonly reported. "You know, we must find some ways of convincing the people to know that what we are telling them is right. At least I must know that even there are some teachers or government workers that when they were schooling, they were drinking the same water as their parents. Now they are boiling their water, and they are not suffering from guinea worm, but their parents continue to suffer. They say: 'How can I boil water? I have no firewood.' Those people think that the teachers and government workers do not suffer from diseases because they have money. We tell them again and again that it is not the money, it is the germs in the water, and that it must be boiled. I think they are beginning to believe me."

There are problems, too, over that sensitive subject, sanitation. "When I spoke to the villagers about the cat system of excreta disposal they did not welcome it, they did not welcome it at all. I told them: 'If you do your defecation in the bush, a fly will come and perch on the stool. You must cover it because a fly has wings and can go anywhere. Even from three miles away it can enter your compound and put germs on your food.' Gradually I think they are beginning to

understand. In time I think we can convince them. The people like us, they listen to what we say."

Not the nicest subject

Grace Norman, a health officer seconded from the Imo State Health Ministry, a redoutable and determined figure, feels that when people begin to understand the connection between poor excreta disposal and ill-health they will take action. Cholera is the disease which strikes fear into people, and guinea worm is a painful and debilitating complaint, much detested. Drinking infested water is the only way the worm can enter the body. It matures in the stomach, and finally emerges millimetre by painful millimetre through a lower limb, virtually immobilizing its host during the days and weeks of the extraction process.

"When I explained to some of the women that the worm was in their water, too small to see, they were amazed. And they did not understand about flies either. They said: 'How awful, if only we had known'. It is not nice to be always talking about pit latrines, about excreta, about diarrhoea, about stools, but anyway we do it. It is necessary to persuade the people to understand and change their habits." Grace finds it hard to bring people to question their way of life. "These people don't know anything except their farming life. When you ask them: 'Wouldn't you like to change?' they look at you as if it is you who needs to change. And maybe they are right to feel like.that. The only thing we can do is bring some basic

amenities, that is all. And then go away."

Pit latrine construction has a tendency to lag behind. The design Grace Norman and her team are promoting is the ventilated improved pit latrine, with a double chamber, a concrete slab, zinc sheeting superstructure with a pipe and a gauze-covered window. But unlike the borehole and the pump whose N4,000 (US$5,700) cost is met by the project, there is little in the way of subsidy. Villagers must raise the money - N185 (US$264) - to build each one, and local masons and carpenters have to be trained, and willing to give their labour free or else be compensated by the community.

Umuka, Chief Awoke Obasi's village in Okposi, has been a model village in pit latrine construction. "Our people are very happy with the pit latrine, and even if today you do not see many, by the end of the year you will see them. In other villages they have stopped building them. Why? Because of disunity."

By disunity Chief Obasi means, essentially, lack of community organization. In Umuka, days are fixed for digging the pits. "Members of the community come and dig where we tell them. When it is time for masonry work, we have some masons ready trained. Each group - the daughters of Umuka in their age-group, the sons in their age-group - have their task. Some bring gravel, others bring sand, and they have all given money. The masons are paid N5 (US$7) a day for feeding. We have no grumbling. We sit down and levy ourselves, and listen to each person, how much he or she can pay at that time, depending on the weather and the harvest.

"In Umuka we have three difficult heads of household who will not co-operate. They drink the water from the pump, but whatever we say they do not pay. Even the UNICEF people came to appeal to them, but they refused. They said UNICEF had the money to drill the well and that there is no need to contribute. They say the water is UNICEF water, given free, and that no-one has the right to stand in their way. We have decided to forget them. If we go on, we pursue a shadow."

The vexed question of compensation for VBWs

A chief as dynamic as Chief Obasi is not completely exceptional, but he is unusual. Communities suffering from "disunity" not only fall behind on pit latrine construction, but somehow cannot resolve the vexed question of compensation for the VBWs either. If the steering committee fails in what Philip Mwankwa of the training team termed their responsibility in this matter, VBWs can become demoralized and disenchanted with their new tasks. The amount is less important to most of them than the recognition it represents. For as Grace Norman expressed it, "this is not the nicest subject": it is not easy to chivy neighbours endlessly about their unclean habits.

Away to the south of Imo State, in Ukwa, the Local Government Area where the project started, the problem of compensation for the VBWs has become acute. Very few have received even a modest fee on a regular basis, and resentment is hampering their motivation: some have dropped out.

Every month there is a meeting of all the VBWs in Ukwa.

The president of their association, a sand and gravel contractor, Ishmael Azubike, recalls that the chiefs of all the villages met some months ago to resolve the problem, and agreed on a monthly allowance for each VBW of N20 (US$29). "But up to now we did not receive anything. The villagers feel they have no money to pay us, and that the local government should pay us. We will continue to do our work because we must save lives, but we are not happy with the villagers and we are not doing as much as we used to. Some villagers say: 'You are a businessman, and you have more money than we do.' But while I do the work, I cannot do my personal job.

"Yesterday we had a meeting and we passed a resolution to write to Lagos that because the villagers did not come forward with the compensation, we will not be spending time going to people's houses telling them to keep their compounds clean. I myself am going to address that letter to Mr Reid the chief of UNICEF in Lagos. I shall write that letter, we shall register that letter, my pen is very strong now."

It is not so much the sum of money - which is an insignificant amount, particularly to a man like Ishmael Azubike with his own business and a fairly large farm holding. It is the absence of appreciation and recognition for the VBWs' status and services that grates. It is not only Azubike, regarded by some as a little above himself, who feels let down. So does another VBW, Cristianah Ogbonna, a delicate bird-like lady whose diminutive stature and sweetness of manner bely her forcefulness. In the group of VBWs in which she was trained, she graduated with the highest marks, higher even than

Azubike's. Unlike him, she states her grievance with reluctance, but she states it eloquently:

"We are nowhere in this work. If we go to the government authorities, they say that we are under UNICEF. If we come to UNICEF, you say that we are under the local government. We have heard that there was a promise, that we should be given an allowance. But this promise will never be fulfilled because the villagers like everything to be free. As we go around they say: 'thank you, thank you,' but that is all. People say that things are hard and they will not pay. Unless the action comes from UNICEF, I don't think there will be an action. We spoke to the chief, but it yielded nothing."

The promised first aid kit

There is another bone of contention among the VBWs in Ukwa which also has a bearing on their lack of recognition. Cristianah Ogbonna: "Things will be better if I have a first aid kit. At the training we were promised it. We expected it. We were told we would give out tablets free. This will make a great difference to people. We refer them to the health centre but when they arrive, they pay for tablets or for an injection like all the other patients. They come and say to us: 'What did you do for me?' They are not pleased.

"The government training team members said they did not give us a first aid kit because of the danger that some VBWs will make themselves into quack doctors. They might say: 'Look at my box', and they might sell a tablet." This is

confirmed by Cecelia Onwugbule, the principal health sister at the local health centre, who was also a member of the project's training team. She says that the VBWs showed such over-enthusiasm for their curative role during training that the training team had second thoughts about the first aid kit.

But Azubike thinks that the problem is more imaginary than real. "If I have the first aid kit and I can give a person an aspirin, more people will come to me and ask for my services, more people will respect me and give me morale. We cannot keep the box in our own houses, but in the chief's house and go there twice a week to see people. To replace the medicines, we can collect money. When you go to a prayer house, and the prophet cures you of an ill, then you repay the prophet. The same will happen with our medicines: the villagers will repay us.

"You question whether you can trust us, but you do not remember the lecture when you told us that we were the ones trusted by the villagers and that was why we were chosen. The VBW has no right to utilize the money or the medicines for himself, but to take the money to the government health authorities. This is up to the chief and the health committee to assure. If he is a wise chief he will control this, and see that the VBWs do not practice medicine in the wrong way."

Azubike has one other complaint. "We were taught the theoretical side of pump maintenance, but we were told we would be given a practical side and that has not been done. I am ready now to put on an overall and go for training. If I can mend the pump at the school which has broken down, people will

respect me. I need respect because I want to maintain my dignity as a nationalist." Unfortunately, it is not possible to train and equip VBWs to perform major pump repairs. This must be the task of mechanics, based at the project headquarters workshop. But above-ground maintenance - greasing, tightening bolts - this could be carried out by VBWs and they will eventually be trained. Whether this will satisfy Azubike remains to be seen.

Cecilia Onwugbule, the health sister now in charge of follow-up since the project moved to Ohaozara, is sanguine about progress in spite of Azubike's "strong pen" and resolutions. "I don't say the VBWs are very active, but they are doing their bit. By now it is possible to tell which ones are really keen and hard-working, and which ones are not interested." Some have dropped out because they never got back into the work after delivering a new baby. Others, like Cristianah Ogbonna who had her fourth child a few months ago will probably continue, allowance or no allowance. "We intend to go around soon and see them all and how they are doing." But Cecilia Onwugbule has a problem in that context: an all-too-familiar shortage of transport.

Exerting effective pressure

It was as a result of the experiences in Ukwa that the idea of village steering committees, to whom the VBWs are responsible, was introduced in Ohaozara by the project team. This is an example of the process of continuous refinements of

the project design which the teams introduce as they go along. So far it is too early to tell whether this mechanism will of itself resolve the problem of compensation and recognition for the VBWs.

Where there is what Chief Obasi calls "disunity", the steering committee may not be able to exert effective enough pressure. And meanwhile, on moral and humanitarian grounds, it is not fair to suggest that village X be denied "the striking of water from the rock" and the resultant salvation from "the menace of cholera and guinea worm" because the capacity of the chief and elders for community organization is less than that of a Chief Obasi.

The real problem - and this is a problem common to many schemes where a pivotal element is the role of volunteer community workers - is that the VBWs do not belong to a category of "officials" recognisable in the villagers' existing perceptions. They are mainly young men and women, and they do not carry the authority automatically conferred on the eze, the chief, and the traditional leaders. Nor are they employees of the government, the other familiar category of workers. So from whence do they derive their authority? As Cristianiah Ogbonna expresses it: "We are nowhere." Without a Chief Obasi to provide continuous endorsement; or without a Cecilia Onwugbule to leave her health centre to the care of her subordinates and set off around the villages to confer her endorsement on the Ukwa VBWs, will they be able to keep on going on until those intractable behaviour patterns have all been changed?

Only the long-term evaluation of the programme can provide an answer. This is why the activities of the enumeration team are ultimately as crucial as the others in assessing the success of the programme. Only the actual results in terms of children's lives saved and improved health will show whether this tremendous effort to make something real of that little phrase "the health education component" is all worthwhile.

Back in Ohaozara at Ushiri primary school, Robert Emeh, a government statistician seconded to the project and leader of the enumeration team, is organizing an unruly line of six- and seven-year-olds. A table has been set up on the verandah outside one of the classrooms, and three of his team are writing the children's names in ledgers and giving out plastic pots and spatulas. In Ibo, Robert explains what they are doing to the children: "We are trying to find out whether there is something wrong with your insides. You take the pot and the spatula, and when you pass your stool early in the morning, you put a piece in the pot and bring it back here this time tomorrow."

Altogether, the team needs samples from 100 children. Most parents are keen to send their children for the survey because they understand that their children's health is involved. The team members give each child a docket number and record family and household details. Should the child turn out to be suffering from diarrhoea, that will also be recorded. The samples are analyzed in a little laboratory up the road, specially equipped by UNICEF, and are then transmitted to Lagos University for further analysis.

Looking at worms

Michael Ajala, the project's microbiologist, looks at a smear from a stool under his microscope. He is trying to establish the degree of hematode (worm) infestation among Ohaozara's child population. In the sample he is looking at, every conceivable kind of worm - round worm, long worm, short worm, crooked worm - is present. This, he says, is not unusual. Many of the children outside the classroom had the protruding stomachs that are a giveaway of great numbers of parasitical inhabitants. Parents are under the delusion that the child looks well-fed.

Six months later the team will return. If they can find the children who had diarrhoea on the previous occasion, they will include them in the next survey. But the main purpose will be to assess whether the level of hematode infestation among the chidren in Ohaozara has declined.

The team also undertakes a survey on diarrhoeal disease. For this survey, teachers and other community members such as the new VBWs are enlisted to distribute charts to mothers in the villages, and help them record information each day about the kind of stools their children are passing. After a given period, the charts are collected and analyzed. The exercise is repeated - not necessarily in the same households - some months later.

At another village called Amenu teams of enumerators, most of them students, are counting compounds and interviewing the

heads of household. There are no reliable census data in Ohaozara, nor indeed in most of Nigeria. And apart from the need to know how many people, especially children, there are in the project area, there is also a need to find out as much as possible about all their existing habits and behaviour patterns concerning water collection and storage, food preparation, and waste disposal before it is possible to assess what needs to be changed, or later on, what has been changed.

The full parameters of the enumeration team activities are exhaustive, and the number of people involved is far the highest of all the teams. This part of the project is supervised and designed by staff from the Ross Institute of Hygiene in London, which has been involved since the outset.

Whatever the precise scientific answers the Ross Institute computers eventually come up with on the impact on child health of the Imo State Water and Sanitation Project, it is impossible to be pessimistic. "Here in Ohaozara the name of UNICEF is indelible", says Chief Obasi. Firstly, there was the miracle of water from the rock, and the comparative abundance of water and its good, clean quality will in themselves do a lot to save people from the "menace of cholera and guinea worm." Secondly, it is impossible to imagine - even if momentum does decline when the teams pack up and move onto the next Local Government Authority - that the weeks and months of "health education" will not make their mark.

Perhaps it will take years to change people's habits enduringly. But one sign that it will come in the next generation if not in this is the extraordinary receptiveness of

the children themselves to the new ideas. Wherever the teams go, whenever they address the steering committees, whenever a trainer visits a compound, a crowd of children always gathers. They listen, they do not speak in front of adult strangers, but they understand.

A new VBW in Isu, a young tailor called Francis Okoro draws attention to the role of the children: "All the local men's and women's groups are not yet convinced, they tell us we are wasting our time. But the boys and girls come and ask questions. They say to their parents: 'You should boil the water, you are doing a wrong thing', and they try to persuade them." Ebere Okereke, a VBW in Umuka village, makes the same point.

In no society is behaviour so entrenched that it cannot change. Ideas come in, ideas like the "good news about water and sanitation", and if they are good ideas, they take root. It is like the pieces of seed yam now being planted in the newly dug mounds in Ibo land: some yield, others do not, but if enough pieces are put in the mound, some kind of harvest is assured. The Imo State Water and Sanitation Project is a landmark project, and within the multiple components of its design, so carefully evolved and evolving, is the promise of a major impact on the health and welfare of all the rural Nigerian children it has touched and it has yet to touch.

The people accept this and they do it

Mrs. Ebere Okereke is 28-years-old and she already has seven children. The youngest is a baby boy aged two months, called Nkemdirim, which in Ibo means: "Let my own be mine for my own". It is Nkemdirim who has kept Mrs. Okereke at home today: it is the custom for women with newly-born infants not to take part in farming activities, even at the height of the planting season.

Mrs Okereke is a village-based worker in Umuka village, the village of Chief Obasi in Okposi. Mr. Okike Ukpa of the training team is a local man and knows that she will be at home for a follow-up visit. She appears to have a sound grasp of her responsibilities.

"Since the wells and the handpumps came, the six of us VBWs have organized ourselves to keep watch on the sites. We avoid the people from using dirty vessels in collecting their water. They sweep the area around the handpump every morning, and avoid people defecating near the site. There are to be no dirty things and no refuse. The people accept this and they do it."

"People are very happy. This is the first time in their lives they can witness a handpump giving clean water to be easily collected, and this they owe to UNICEF." Perhaps as a result, people pay their levies regularly, and Mrs. Okereke receives her monthly N20 (US$29) allowance and is content.

There are some problems with the new latrines. "At the beginning the VIP latrines were built on sites selected by the

sanitation team and the chief, and the landowners objected. The steering committee spoke to the landowners, and now they do accept." The latrines so far constructed are public latrines, constructed with community resources, for demonstration purposes. "Many people have not started to build their individual household latrines. Many promise to start, but they do not do so. They say funds are the problem. We must increase. I am asking people to carry the message as far as they can to tell others that without pit latrines, UNICEF will not allow them to continue to use the water."

Ukpa asks her why she has bathed only her baby this morning, and not her other children. He says she should be an example to others, and that if she does not wash her children others will not. Mrs. Okereke looks bashful. She has no answer. Has she taught the use of the chewstick for brushing teeth to children in the surrounding compounds? Or explained that they must wash their hands after going to the latrine?

"Children learn these things in group discussions in the evening. When their mother does wrong things, children of five- or even seven-years-old will say: 'I will report you to the VBW, and you will be made to change.'"

The people are not attending to us

Mr. Ogbonnaya Agwu is the chairman of the VBWs in Okposi, and he lives in a village called Mebiawa where the "good news about water and sanitation" has not been received as warmly as it has in Umuka, for example. "To be frank, when we trained, we loved to feel eager to do our work. But certain ones have dropped out because of lack of support from their own people. They are not attending to us as we expected, they don't cater for us, they don't give us some allowances.

"During our training we read some magazines from India, where people like us are treating cases of diseases like malaria, and from these cases they are getting something - enough to buy soap, to keep themselves clean, for example. Some of our chiefs tried for a while to persuade the people, but there was no support from the government authority so they gave up.

"Teams visited the villages to encourage the communities. The steering community for all Okposi talked of giving us N10 monthly. But in some villages there was no result. In Umuka they are giving that and even more. But not in our village. They promised to do work for us at our farms, because they could not give us money, they said. Now the planting season is here, and perhaps they will do it. But as for community levies they will do it for the pit latrines, but not for us. They say UNICEF trained us and should give us salary.

"The people do not understand the importance of VBWs' work, they do not see it as UNICEF sees it. But I do see a change in

attitudes. The cleaning of compounds and houses has improved, roads are kept tidy and the marketplace. The message about cleanliness is getting through. Before, a woman going out of her house to go to market would not wash. Now she washes her face, her hands and her clothes more often.

"As time goes on, our people will realize the importance of the UNICEF project and the importance of the latrines. I think people do believe the connection between faeces and disease. If people are faced with two things, the latrine or the water, they will choose the water. But they appreciate both things.

"One thing we have pushed is the market. It is an offense to display food on the ground, and when we catch such people we gather the items, we gather the mangoes if they are rotten, and throw them in a pit. We report the case to the market committee, and they do treat the women accordingly."

The project structure

The Imo State Water and Sanitation Project was launched in late 1981 by the Federal Government of Nigeria with assistance from UNICEF, as a response to the challenge of the International Water Supply and Sanitation Decade 1981-90. The project began in Imo State, in Ukwa Local Government Area, was extended to Ohaozara LGA in the second half of 1982, and will move to Afikpo LGA during 1983.

A further seven LGAs in Imo State are to be provided with 30 boreholes each to satisfy the expectations that the project has aroused among people and local leaders alike. A project "fast track" design, including a community level mobilization and health education component which deploys more modest levels of human resources, is being developed. The evaluation team will study its results for comparison with the Ukwa/Ohaozara/Afikpo model.

One important characteristic of the Imo State project is its multisectoral aspect. Six State ministries, co-ordinated by the Ministry of Community Development and Co-operatives, are represented on the State steering committee: Health, Economic Development, Public Utilities, Agriculture, and Local Government. Between them they have seconded to the project more than 70 staff, including health educators, sanitarians, social statisticians, typists and drivers.

The State Government has contributed N300,000 (US$429,000) annually to the programme. UNICEF inputs from August 1981 to December 1982 came to $3 million, and by the end of 1983, 50

per cent of the costs will be provided by Imo State.

A project along almost identical lines has already begun in a second State, Gongola in the northeast of Nigeria, and another is scheduled to begin in a third state, Kwara in the west, before the end of 1983.

By January 1984, 275,000 villagers in Nigeria will have benefitted. This represents a small proportion of Nigeria's estimated 60 million rural inhabitants. But the programme design established in Ukwa and Ohaozara has been adopted by Imo State as a model, and there are clear signs that the Imo State model will be adopted as a national model. The key to extending the success of rural development programmes to reach greater numbers of people is the design of models that are replicable. Replicability has been seen as a programme target throughout the complex process of the Imo State project's evolution.

An important consideration for replicability is cost-effectiveness. The Imo State project is providing communities with clean water at a cost per villager of between US$9 and US$16. This compares with an average per capita cost of US$68 for other Nigerian water supply projects - a cost five times higher. And these other projects do not even contain the social components of the Imo State project "package", regarded by UNICEF as its essence. The Imo State project costs also compare favourably with a figure of US$25 cited by the World Bank as the lowest attainable cost per villager for installation of a community-shared handpump.

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The article describes the local scene in Okpozi, Ohaozara, Imo State, where UNICEF had installed a well, saving the inhabitants from cholera, Guinea worm, diarrhoea, and other waterborne diseases that had been infesting the watershort area. Local people's reactions and comments are included. The article was prepared for UNICEF News. A letter from the author defending the article's position is also included.

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