

Hygiene improvement at scale

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Abstract

The Hygiene Improvement Project (HIP) is a USAID-funded project tasked to work at scale in five countries around the world. As the Symposium's background paper Learning Alliances for scaling up innovative approaches in the Water and Sanitation sector noted, real changes cannot occur until the water and sanitation sector moves beyond the pilot stage. Several ways exist to ensure that interventions reach a wide range of target groups. One way, as described in the background paper, is scaling up pilot approaches systematically, building on the innovation process. The HIP team is exploring a range of approaches to bring about at-scale hygiene behavior change in a country.

HIP intends to approach hygiene improvement AT scale, catalyzing the system, rather than individuals, to simultaneously plan and act on a common goal. The resulting synergy from all inputs drives the system to change. When all parts of the system reinforce the same improved behaviors, these behaviors become the social norm and are thus sustainable over time.

An at-scale method is quite different from scaling up. As described in the background paper, scaling up starts with a successful small project or an innovation that has worked in a particular controlled setting and tries to restructure the program to work in a larger, or less controlled context. This approach may be flawed for all the reasons outlined in the background paper: the situation is very controlled, well funded and staffed, local ownership may not be necessary, and replication is rarely planned from the start.

How does HIP envision starting at scale?

At-scale approaches are not new. HIP seeks to adapt proven approaches that have been used in a variety of sectors, such as natural resource management, but have not yet been used extensively in the water, sanitation, and hygiene sector.

Large programs are based solely on geographic coverage and often have a limited scope e.g. latrine construction. Rather than being limited to size alone, HIP's concept of scale is a set of program characteristics that are necessary but not always sufficient on their own to achieve sustained new behaviors.

The characteristics HIP has identified to start at scale are engaging:

- Multiple stakeholders at
- Multiple levels (international, national, sub-national, community) using
- Multiple interventions working on
- Multiple practices (hand washing, safe disposal of feces, water storage and treatment)

HIP intends to incorporate these multiples into any hygiene improvement program and work to achieve sustained change. HIP will also work to integrate hygiene improvement into health and non-health efforts, so it becomes mainstreamed and moves from being just one of many development "causes" to being an integral part of all development efforts.

Working at scale also means focusing on all three components of the hygiene improvement framework (access to hardware, hygiene promotion and enabling environment), a model articulated by USAID's

Environmental Health Project (EHP), a forerunner to HIP and ensuring that hygiene improvement is integrated into policies, budgets, training programs, media campaigns, etc.

HIP will work simultaneously to improve hand washing, safe disposal of feces, and safe storage and treatment of water at POU. Research shows that reinforcing behaviors, for example, washing hands with soap after using the toilet, can assist in sustaining improved behaviors. In addition, consumers desire options, which further help to stimulate demand, e.g., toilet designs, water purification options, soap brands. Lasting change ultimately depends on a critical mass of people taking action and new social norms being formed. This can occur when individuals encounter the same message at every key contact point in their lives.

The very core of HIP's at-scale approach is to address the system level rather than the individual household level. Yet it is at the individual level that the behavior change occurs and where the impact of such an at-scale approach will be detected. We believe that at-scale approaches can be sustainable, cost-effective, realistic, and doable. But we still have to test them and then share what works and what does not.

As one of several approaches to work at scale, HIP will use or adapt a strategic planning model called Future Search, a set of tools and assumptions that brings all stakeholders including beneficiaries together to find common ground from which all stakeholders can move ahead in a complementary and synergistic manner. We chose to highlight this model in this paper because we have experience using it and because it addresses some challenges Learning Alliances face.

Before embarking on a Future Search, it has to be determined to be the right approach to take. How does one determine this? First, a solid "business" reason must exist to do a Future Search, e.g., a technology change, need for coordinated efforts, change in leadership, other efforts have failed. But it is important to ask key questions. For example, is this the right time? Will the right stakeholders come to the workshop and stay for all three days? When a diverse group of stakeholders comes together to search for future vision, the result is to identify shared intentions and for each stakeholder to take responsibility for specific doable actions. To move this large disparate group with multiple realities ahead, the future search method reviews the past, explores the present, creates ideal future scenarios, identifies common ground, and makes plans for action.⁹

Future Search approaches several issues differently than Learning Alliances and in some cases may help to answer some questions posed by the background paper. However, FS too has challenges. This paper addresses the right stakeholder mix, working with the stakeholders, facilitation, addressing problems and differences, timeframe, participation leading to action, continued joint learning, and explores the challenges this model faces.

The right stakeholder mix

Some foundations on which Future Search is based are very much in-line with the Learning Alliance approach. In particular, Future Search depends on bringing together the right mix of stakeholders who have both a vested interest in improving hygiene at the household level and the authority to make decisions. By the end of the three-day Future Search, each stakeholder makes commitments to accomplish specific actions or tasks that are within his or her scope; thus as a whole, the group can reach the jointly articulated future quite quickly.

The one key stakeholder group that may differ from the Learning Alliance approach is the household members themselves; those who need to change hygiene behaviour. As one Future Search participant noted, "Change really comes when the people who need it most sit with people who can make things happen."¹⁰

⁹ *Future Search: An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations and Communities*, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 135.

It is vital to bring all the needed stakeholders to the table. In a Future Search, this begins by identifying the sponsor who understands the issues and the context and determining whether Future Search is the right model. Planning for the future search workshop may take six to nine months for the sponsoring organization to identify and build the steering committee. As in Learning Alliances, choosing the steering committee (core stakeholder group) is essential; it takes time and a careful assessment of potential stakeholders. The steering committee members must be able to identify all the necessary players from the many different sectors and levels of society (national, district, community) and have the authority and dynamism to invite and deliver all the necessary stakeholders to the Future Search workshop. This commitment and attention to detail in choosing the steering committee is vital because without the right people in the room, either action will not occur or the actions that do take place are not the needed ones.

Also, the steering committee must include a diverse selection of stakeholders so that different perspectives are shared from the beginning. When identifying the prospective stakeholders, the steering committee must identify people with resources, authority, expertise, information and need. This should be an unusual group—one that makes the planners both anxious and excited.¹¹

Working with the Stakeholders

The Learning Alliance model involves multiple stakeholder groups at different levels: national, intermediate, and community and encourages participants from different stakeholder groups to learn together by segmenting into these different levels. The Future Search model also encourages cross-stakeholder learning but in a slightly different way. Future Search has participants work in stakeholder groups, in mixed groups where only one or two similar stakeholders are in any one group, and in voluntary groups, where participants choose to sit together. Usually stakeholders sit together for long enough to learn two things: 1) participants in the same stakeholder group do not always share the same views and values and 2) sometimes different stakeholder groups see issues the same way.¹²

When people sit in mixed groups they often hear different perspectives and values that enable them to see their reality with different eyes and help to deepen the discussion. When the same participants reconvene into the initial mixed group later in the process, they have usually undergone some changes and bring their new learning to the group as well as a new concept of what is feasible. Voluntary groups usually come to work around action plans and commitments for the future.

Facilitation

Future Search requires a hands-off approach to facilitation that defies traditional training styles. This does not mean facilitators are not engaged, but rather the FS principle is that groups must manage themselves and take responsibility for their contributions and actions. This ensures that the participants own the process and the commitments they make to act. The facilitator serves to move the process to the next step once all voices have been heard. This process addresses the Learning Alliance concern about the need to empower less enfranchised stakeholders because Future Search creates an open equalized space for all to contribute. Responsibility for participation rests on the individuals themselves and the overall group management. The idea is for the facilitator to fade into the background: facilitators should not be seen as experts or be invested in the process because it will detract from the process and the possible outcomes. The groups themselves take on many of the facilitation tasks: each group has a discussion leader, a timekeeper, a recorder and a spokesperson. The external facilitator does not monitor understanding or compliance with exercises or activities, but leaves it up to each group to self-manage.

Another key role for the facilitator is to ensure that controversial views are not alone. Organizational theory has shown that different ideas will shift when no one voices support. Thus, the facilitator's role is to help ensure that at least one ally will support any other idea, so the person expressing the original

¹¹ *Managing a Future Search Learning Workshop*. Section 3, page 1.

¹² *Future Search: An Action Guide to Finding Common Ground in Organizations and Communities*, p. 175.

contradicting viewpoint does not become an outcast. This too helps to ensure that all voices are heard, even if they are different.

The Learning Alliance paper questions whether core members can be facilitators. According to the Future Search approach, they cannot as it is virtually impossible to facilitate and contribute at the same time. Future Search principles dictate that facilitators should be external to the learning because they have neither a vested interest in the outcomes nor a particular perspective on the issues that arise.

Addressing Differences and Problems

Future Search fundamentally differs from the Learning Alliance approach in the way the process addresses problems that arise within the groups. While the Learning Alliance approach appears to bring the divergent stakeholders together to identify problems and to develop solutions in a participatory way, so that everyone has a voice; as mentioned, Future Search creates a space in which all voices can be heard and empowered to act. The method recognizes that problems exist, but does not attempt to solve them. Indeed, while Future Search gives space for participants to articulate their problems and even have these problems validated, the workshop is not about looking at what has already happened, but keeps the group focused on the future by identifying the common ground from which to act together. By acknowledging the history (and conflict), but agreeing to set it aside for another time and place, all stakeholders can focus on this mutually established common ground and on the actions they have committed to for the future. This keeps the group focused on the task rather than on the conflict.¹³

Because the FS process culminates with each individual's personal commitment to act, the process values the efforts each can make within his or her particular reality. It does not judge whose contribution is more dynamic or important, but recognizes that all contributions are necessary to advance closer to the future vision articulated by the workshop.

Timeframe

The process of change takes a long time and concerted effort. But in our high-speed, credit card culture where transactions take place instantaneously, we have become addicted to fast paced change. HIP recognizes the need to educate those who establish short time frames and expect to see demonstrable change. But these partners are often pressured by other forces, e.g., by officials seeking reelection who need proof that change is happening.

The background paper posits that Learning Alliances cannot operate in this fast, results-oriented culture. Yet, this pace is part of the reality in which we operate, and we need to determine collectively how to work constructively within it, while seeking to change it. HIP believes we need to define outcomes that project the way things are moving and articulate them convincingly so all stakeholders see the forward movement.

Participation Leading to Action

FS is a process that validates any and all contributions that each participant agrees to undertake either individually or with others in the group both during the workshop and during implementation. Thus the concern in the Learning Alliance approach that potentially important stakeholders are currently disempowered is not an issue in Future Search methodology. A broad mix of stakeholders in the whole system must be in the room together, and they work on a level playing field. Experience with this approach indicates that very often so much excitement is generated, that those who once seemed incapable of action are the people who can accomplish the most. No action is too small, and people will volunteer to act when they feel comfortable making the commitment—not when they are coerced into action.

¹³ Ibid. p. 178.

Continued Joint Learning

Change takes place incrementally. Thus, any type of strategic planning methodology necessitates an iterative process that fosters joint learning to bring about sustained change. Once an at-scale process has been completed with multiple stakeholders committing to contribute to common objectives, time is given to accomplish these actions. After six to twelve months stakeholders gather again to revisit the immediate past and to share knowledge about their experiences. More importantly, any new stakeholders are invited to join the effort—learning from the past experiences of the group and injecting their own perspective into the learning mix. Each time the group returns together, the space for learning is opened, and because each time the blend of stakeholders is slightly different they learn from each other and from experiencing new perspectives.

In the Philippines, for example, after engaging multiple stakeholders in a future search type conference to restore degraded coral reefs and fishing grounds across 1800 miles of coastline, a wide range of activities were implemented: schools promoted the value of reefs; celebrities and the media advocated to save the reefs; the private sector started job retraining programs for fisherfolk; universities, scuba divers and diving clubs engaged in research; banks started savings clubs; and international agencies engaged the tourist agencies in saving the reefs. A future search conference was held initially for the large group. But as implementation began, search conferences were also held for subgroups to help determine concrete actions. Mayors from 640 coastal towns and villages met first to set a series of policies and then annually to review plans and pledges each had made. After five years, 1800 miles of coastline had been protected with policies and programs, communities had mobilized to protect resources, and fish stocks rebounded based on sound research. UNESCO awarded the marine parks a special prize for the recovery and health of the reefs. The coastal reform process was supported by a special government tax on certain luxury items.

Such iterative processes are crucial for promoting joint learning and to move the development agenda forward in positive manner so that the same traps are not visited again and again and so that changes are truly sustained over the long term.

Challenges

Like Learning Alliances, the Future Search methodology also poses some fundamental challenges that have to be addressed. For example, one key challenge for the steering committee is getting commitment from the designated stakeholders to attend the entire two and a half day process that takes place over three days. Participants build on what is being learned throughout the process, so intermittent participation is not optional. This can sometimes be a stumbling block. The steering committee must also vet any personnel substitutions to ensure that the person actually attending has the authority to make decisions during the action planning phase.

Getting people to move from a comfort zone to the unknown is also difficult. People enter the process with their own prejudices and stereotypes and some sense of how they perceive the future. The purpose of the shared search for the future is not to reduce anxiety and uncertainty to a simple problem to be solved. Rather, the process acknowledges the discomfort people feel while in the process and posits that this creates the dynamic stimulus needed to come up with creative action. For this reason as well it is important for participants to commit to the whole process from beginning to end.

As mentioned earlier, finding a facilitator without a vested interest in the outcome of the Future Search is critical. Thus, HIP members for example would not be able to facilitate a Future Search because, in fact, our team comes to the process as a stakeholder who should participate in defining common ground and committing to act wherever possible.

Conclusion

As we said in the beginning, as all actions converge on a new future—focusing on an iterative process that promotes joint learning—HIP anticipates that one or several improved hygiene behaviors will be practiced by a large segment of the population so that they become the social norm, the “given” behavioral option. Once recognized as normative behaviour, more and more people then adopt these improved behaviours so that they become more prevalent and sustained over time. This, in turn, will prevent diarrheal disease and keep children alive and healthier so they can reach their potential in building a stronger healthier world.