

Household Water Treatment and Safe Storage Implementation Case Study: Ceramic Pot Filters

THRIST-AID INTERNATIONAL, MYANMAR

Introduction

Thirst-Aid International is an NGO headquartered in the USA. Their primary focus is the prevention of waterborne illnesses that result in diarrheal morbidity and death, particularly among children under five. Thirst-Aid promotes education and knowledge as the principal tools for safe water intervention, inspiring the drive for improved water quality to come from within communities prior to the introduction of household water treatment technologies.

Thirst-Aid has been implementing ceramic filters in Myanmar since 2004. Their current project started in February 2006 and they have distributed approximately 200,000 filters in the country, providing about one million people with safe drinking water. They have also responded to emergency situations, such as providing filters after the 2005 tsunami that affected Southern Thailand and the 2008 cyclone in Myanmar. Thirst-Aid's plans to scale up to reach an additional 14 million people in Myanmar.

In addition to implementing ceramic filters themselves, Thirst-Aid is also working with the private sector to create a market. They have set up ceramic filter factories in the country, who ultimately become independent commercial manufacturers. Their work is supporting the development of the private sector by helping to build capacity and empowering local people.

Creating Demand

Thirst-Aid creates demand for safe drinking water by promoting education and knowledge as investment capital. They base their approach on the assumption that educated people do not willingly drink contaminated water – much less give it to their children.

They use a marketing campaign that targets the population that can afford ceramic filters.

There are two filter models, one for the middle class and one for the working poor.

Thirst-Aid staff conducts awareness raising and education with a variety of target audiences, including women's groups, schools, monasteries, orphanages, community based organizations, NGOs and international NGOs. They meet and follow up with the different groups as often as necessary.

Their staff use a variety of education tools and communication methods, including billboards, posters, games, flip charts, hands on practice and videos. Thirst-Aid created most of their education materials, with contributions from UNICEF. The government supports the program by approving their education materials before use.

Thirst-Aid provides the currency for community buy-in by issuing *Certificates of Knowledge* upon successful completion of their educational program. These certificates serve as legal tender that can be later used for the purchase of household water treatment technologies.

Thirst-Aid emphasizes that in order to create demand, the filters should not be viewed as a give-away product for the poor. They should be marketed as a desirable, easy to use and effective product for everyone who needs improved water.



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Supplying Products and Services

Thirst-Aid first started with their own ceramic filter factory that employed local staff to manufacture filters for distribution through larger and international NGOs.

Thirst-Aid has since established eight ceramic filter factories in Myanmar. Once fully operational, the facilities are turned over to local people as income generation projects.

It has taken Thirst-Aid at least two years of training and support to make sure that the manufacturers truly understand the entire process; and that quality, production, and the market can be sustained. Based on their experience, Thirst-Aid recommends that new implementers do not start ceramic filter production unless they are willing to maintain a long-term presence and are certain of a sustainable market.

The units sell for between US\$8 to \$19 depending on the receptacle, distance from source, and manufacturer. Currently, filters are typically sold to international NGOs who have their own objectives and distribution methods, they have not agreed on a common standard.

While some NGOs distribute fully subsidized filters to households, Thirst-Aid advocates for them to be a commercial product and not something that people view as something that should or will be given to them. Thirst-Aid anticipates the biggest obstacle will be NGO's giving filters away without requiring recipients to invest at some level. It is difficult for Thirst-Aid to promote and market filters through the private sector if households believe it is a product for the poor and that if they wait long enough they might receive one for free.

Monitoring and Improvement

Thirst-Aid has a monitoring program to ensure quality control of their filter production process.

Most of the filters currently in use were distributed by NGOs in response to Cyclone Nargis, and as funding for this disaster has been used, there is currently little follow-up or monitoring being done by any organization besides Thirst-Aid.

Thirst-Aid also supports continuous improvement of implementation programs in the region. With support from UNICEF, they organized the "Myanmar Ceramic Water Filter Summit; Post Nargis Evaluation – Lessons Learned" that was attended by 13 international organizations, including several from Cambodia and Thailand.

Program Financing

Thirst-Aid's education component takes up about 75% of their project implementation resources, in terms of both money and time. Thirst-Aid recommends that other implementers should be willing to invest as much in education and training as they do in the technology. Funding for Thirst-Aid's awareness raising and education activities are provided by donors and partners, including UNICEF.

Most of the private sector manufacturers have already recovered their costs (including promotion, production, distribution and follow-up) and have a price system that will make it possible for them to earn an adequate profit.

References

Bradner, C. Personal communication, July 2010.

Further Information

Thirst-Aid: www.thirst-aid.org