



Innovative Hygiene Corner in WASH Humanitarian Response in Migration Scenario in Latin America and the Caribbean

SUMMARY

This field note shares the innovative experience of *Hygiene Tents, Casitas or Hygiene Corners* as a modality of humanitarian response of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) for refugees and migrants in transit at host communities in Latin America region, specifically in the hygiene response area. Through constant needs assessment in the migration scenario, and the implementation of principles of accountability to affected populations, done by beneficiaries and humanitarian staff from UNICEF and its partners Pure Water for the World (PWW) in Honduras, *Fundación Halü* and *Fundación para el Saneamiento, Ambiente, Higiene, Emprendimiento y Desarrollo Sostenible (SAHED)* in Colombia, and *Operación Bendición* in Mexico, it was evident that through traditional delivery of personal hygiene kits, not all items were carried by beneficiaries in their route, thereby discarding, or reselling those less useful.¹

Through direct observation, the following information was gathered and analyzed:

- Gradual consumption of hygiene kit items during the migratory route
- Specific requests of beneficiaries for smaller hygiene products to ease transport
- Disposal of supplies before border crossings

This situation indicated the convenience to shift towards delivery of hygiene items by demand. In addition, the disposal of supplies received through hygiene kits negatively influence waste management due to accumulated waste on migratory routes, affecting the humanitarian principle of 'do no harm'. Thus, intersectoral coordination is implemented to reduce the number of hygiene kits delivered ("zero kits") on migratory routes. Finally, *Hygiene Tents, Casitas or Hygiene Corners* provide cost-effectiveness in humanitarian response, addressing potential donor and government fatigue in the face of multiple humanitarian crises and their financial impacts.

¹ A personal hygiene kit consists of a medium-sized bag (50x70 cm for example) which can be carried on the migratory route by an adult, containing basic supplies for personal hygiene, such as soap, toilet paper, sanitary pads, Shampoo, toothbrush and toothpaste, etc., in varying quantities (from 5 to 15 products approx.)

Introduction

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) needs of migrants and refugee population, specifically of those in transit attempting long journeys without access to services, have increased considerably across the region, generating new type of challenges for the WASH sector in migration response. For example, in 2022, more than 250,000 people tried to cross the Darien jungle that separates Colombia from Panama with the objective of reaching North America, according to the Response for Venezuelans (R4V), Refugee and Migrants Needs Analysis (RMNA) 2023² in transit population reported difficulties and barriers such as financial and availability, to access adequate hygienic supplies including menstrual hygiene materials for their well-being,

BOX 1. MIXED MIGRATION FLOWS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the mixed migration flows are dynamic and often intersect; most countries are simultaneously points of origin, transit, destination, and return.

According to a UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean Child alert report published in September 2023, in 2022 some 250,000 migrants, including 40,000 children crossed the Darien. Over 196,000 migrants crossed from January to June of 2023, including more than 40,000 children. Among the nationalities of migrants are countries from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and South America. However, they have varying demographic profiles, needs, migration status and motivations for migrating.

In the face of challenges described above, the distribution of hygiene kits by UNICEF was replaced by the personalized distribution of hygiene supplies, through *tiendas* (store/corner – free of charge) or stands located at strategic spots

² R4V - Refugee and migrants need Analysis 2023- WASH Regional Chapter available at: <https://rmp.r4v.info/rmna2023/>

close to migration registration facilities, at migration reception centers, and at hydration stations along the migration route of Colombia before entering the Darien Jungle, Honduras and Mexico. These distribution service remain open during peak transit hours, easily identifiable by beneficiaries through signaling and banners, and informed during the registration process at the migrant reception centers.

Figure1: “Casita de la higiene” (Little hygiene House) at the Migrant Care Center in Danlí, El Paraiso, Honduras



Source: Pure Water for the World, Honduras

Figure 2: Map of the geographical area of implementation in Colombia, Honduras and Mexico, through the migration route.



Hygiene corner personnel mainly from local implementing partners or UNICEF, ensure to provide general information and carry out the replacement and distribution of products to beneficiaries at each distribution stand. They also ensure the appropriate registration of delivered items and beneficiaries basic information, hygiene promotion actions, including consultations on the usefulness of the items, and whether they missed any item among the current availability.

Beneficiaries may enter the *tiendas* or interact through shop windows, depending on available space at migrant attention points. In case of an increase of beneficiaries in the waiting line to access the hygiene corner services, additional designated personnel would support.

Figure 3: Promotional post on UNICEF Colombia's Instagram social network



BOX 2.

PROMOTION OF THE INITIATIVE

Hygiene Corners are promoted through a variety of means including:

1. *Social media posts i.e., the Instagram accounts of UNICEF Country offices or local partners*
2. *Word of mouth*
3. *Information about available WASH services for in transit migrants on site and online.*

Products may be stored in dispensers (cabinets), and WASH humanitarian staff shows examples of the products on a table located in a visible place, explaining that they are without charge based on needs, then proceeding to registration of receipt. In other cases, beneficiaries are organized in circuits, where they receive orientation and briefings on hygiene (hand washing, water safety and menstrual hygiene), and then move to the *Rincón de la Higiene* (Hygiene corner), where they decide what they need.

Hygiene items have been selected as per needs expressed by direct feedback in consultation with migrants in the stands and under standards of the Global WASH Cluster. On-demand distribution of items allows trends to be analyzed and procurement processes for UNICEF and its partners to be aligned. Current supplies agreed by UNICEF Country Offices and implementing partners doing WASH migration response with the feedback from beneficiaries are: sanitary pads, hand towels, toilet paper, shampoo, comb, a reusable water jerrycan, soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes for adults, children, mosquito repellents, sunscreen, deodorants, disposable diapers, diaper cream, masks, 10lts jerrycans for water transport, buckets for water storage for beneficiaries staying longer terms, glasses for drinking water, backpacks/bags to store supplies and document carrying cases.

Figure 4: “Tienda Humanitaria Somos un Mundo” in Necoclí, Antioquia, Colombia.



Source: UNICEF Colombia

The control of items per person, basic information such as nationality, age and gender are recorded in a database. To avoid duplication, the registration process may include either the beneficiary registration number, evidence of a departure ticket or evidence of registration at migration offices. The registration and tracking is done using KOBO or physical forms.

The distribution of items includes hygiene promotion activities ranging from: one-to-one meetings, positioning strategic risk communication messages in local language and foreign language if available or in printed infographics at key spots, to mini-workshops. Topics of these hygiene promotion and communication activities include proper use of WASH facilities, services and supplies, the safe and appropriate use of water, hand washing in mobile sinks, promotion of oral and menstrual hygiene. The risk communication messages about healthy WASH habits complements the short timeframe available for hygiene promotion activities, since beneficiaries enter resting centers between 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., and then continue to travel along their routes.

The time of the process of delivery of supplies and hygiene promotion activities lasts between 4 and 5

minutes per group / family, and up to 10 minutes for mini workshops.

Figure 5: Example of communication message on Menstrual Hygiene in Mexico



Source: Operación Bendición Mexico A.C. in partnership with UNICEF Mexico

To ensure feedback under principles of accountability, suggestion boxes or “buzon de los sentires (box of feelings)” are continuously processed to improve the intervention strategy, to optimize the selection of products in demand, and to evaluate the level of consumer satisfaction. Some messages have indicated a need for

BOX 3. ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATION

Hygiene corner beneficiary feedback and complains are key to Improve quality of WASH programs and response as part of the Core functions 6+1 of WASH National Coordination platform.

clothes or sandals, ointments for scrapes, peeling creams (yodora), that have been added as feasible. It is also common to find messages of satisfaction with the assistance received, as part of a good process of accountability to affected populations.

Figure 6: Examples of protection Communication Messages “En el camino cuidamosno!” used in hygiene corners in Colombia available in Spanish, Portuguese, English and French.



Results

During the short period of operation of the initiative, ranging from 3 to 12 months in 2022 and early 2023, beneficiaries have improved their access to basic hygiene services, under a cost-effective strategy that allows reaching a greater number of beneficiaries, informed by principles of accountability. The total population benefited in 12 months has been 11,300 people in Colombia and 15,254 people in Honduras. In Mexico, in 3 months, 2,424 people were reached.

The following graph shows products with the highest demand in Honduras:

Figure 7: Hygiene supplies with the highest demand in Honduras

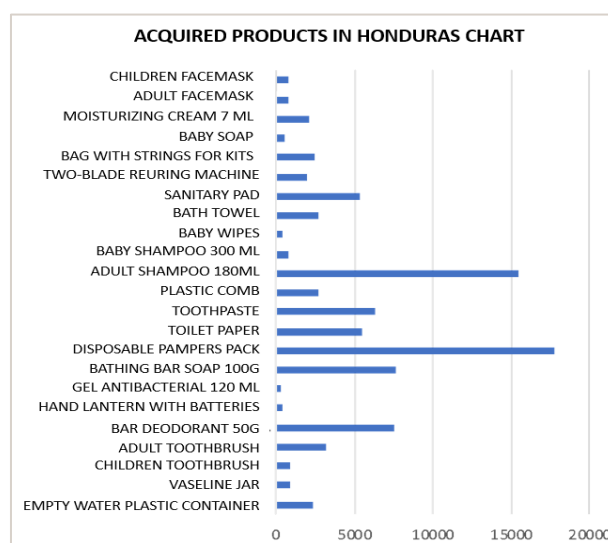
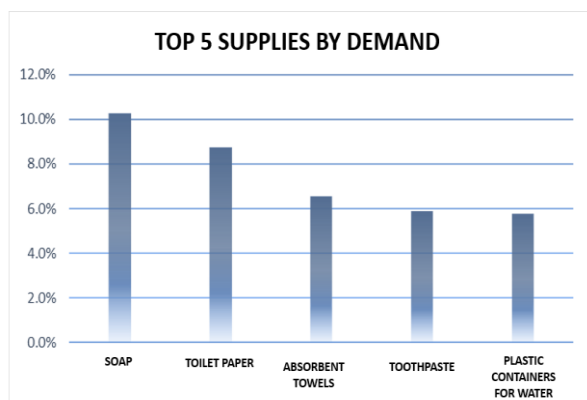


Figure 8: Hygiene supplies with the highest demand in Colombia as of March 2023



A quick estimate of cost-effectiveness by direct observation and results of this innovative modality in Honduras, shows increasing beneficiaries by 72 per cent, from 8,846 people with hygiene kits to 15,254 through hygiene items.

The analysis of the inputs with the highest demand allows the informed acquisition and replacement of inputs, to ensure the relevance and speed in the WASH humanitarian response.

This strategy allows immediate perceived needs to be addressed in an inclusive and differentiated manner, simplifying distribution logistics for differentiated groups such as women, persons with disabilities, infants, and children.

The inclusion of activities to promote healthy hygiene habits and practices to reach behavioral change among migrants, also complements the strategy and initiative.

This distribution modality facilitates intersectoral and inter-agency coordination in some cases, through joint delivery of hygiene supplies with other humanitarian actors as IOM, CRC, IRC and local government agencies.

In other cases, constant communication with multiple humanitarian actors is coordinated from the WASH cluster or coordination platforms, to avoid duplication. A trend to stop deliveries of kits altogether, and to substitute them with customized

hygiene items is gaining force across all countries, supporting also adequate waste management along the migrant routes as well as cost effectiveness. It will be necessary to analyze in the future, the transfer of hygiene items distribution response capacities to governments and local institutions under this modality.

Adequate proper waste management has been a priority objective in the establishment of this mode of distribution, although currently the environmental impact caused by a reduction of hygiene items solid waste can be measured only by direct observation on migratory routes.

Figure 9: Hygiene Corner at COMAR Pre-Registration Center, Laureles Market, Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo credit: Saydel García, UNICEF Mexico



To achieve speed and relevance, the continuous existence of products is required, good practices such as updated inventories at hygiene corners through registration of items in stock and delivered, the characteristics and amount of beneficiaries attended, awareness raising on the number of most needed items which is usually 5 to 7 that a person can carry to have greater availability of items for those who come after with urgent needs for hygiene items, usage of local providers and existence of small warehouses next to the distribution services, although spaces are very reduced are noteworthy.

Comparison between distribution modalities

Although it is a pilot project, it is possible to compare the modalities of traditional hygiene kits, the customized distribution of inputs and even the distribution of vouchers and / or cash transfers (CVA):

- Customized distribution is more cost-effective than hygiene kits, although, once processes are established, CVA distribution may be cheaper than customized distribution.
- Customized distribution allows communication with beneficiaries (hygiene promotion, information, Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)). Through hygiene kits distribution and CVA, the interaction with the beneficiary is limited.
- The customized distribution " ensures" the use of necessary products. CVA may use the resources for other uses, and hygiene kits distribution may imply discarding some items by the beneficiaries, including reselling them.
- The Customized distribution of hygiene corners is slower than through in-kind Hygiene kits, and CVA and may have lower service capacity in terms of the number of populations served.
- Customized distribution of items of hygiene corners- reduces the presence of solid waste versus Hygiene kits distribution, that usually have more items, that migrants often discard, generating more solid waste.
- CVA distribution ensures strengthening the local market. Customized and Hygiene kits distribution contribute to local markets depending on where the delivered products are purchased.
- Proper maintenance of pre-positioned supplies is easier through itemized warehousing. With hygiene kits items contained in one bag, the gel or water might spill and damage other items.

Below is a brief comparative analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the three modalities in reference:

Table 1. Comparative table of advantages and disadvantages by modality of distribution (+) Advantage, (-) Disadvantage, analysis done by LACRO and COs based on experience.

Indicator	Custom	Hygiene kits	CVA
Cost reduction	++	-	++
Communication- Accountability to the affected population	++	+/-	-
Using distributed products	++	+	+/-
Serviceability	+/-	+	++
Waste generation	+/-	++	+/-
Boost local market	+/-	+/-	++

Lessons Learned

- The initiative has worked in the specific context of continuous flow of people in transit, reducing costs in relation to an in-kind (Hygiene kits) distribution, allowing beneficiaries to select those products with the highest priority, to provide information regarding hygiene practices and to integrate other sectors around the service.
- The volume of beneficiaries attended may be lower than through the delivery of hygiene kits due to time of attention per person / family.
- When enough physical space is available for hygiene promotion activities, a positive impact is achieved, which is more difficult in reduced spaces.
- The existence of a sufficiently large warehouse is necessary, to facilitate the supply to the point of delivery of inputs.
- To avoid duplication of deliveries, the availability of personnel on a permanent basis is required while assistance is provided, as well as coordination of humanitarian actors.
- The impact on solid waste generated by an inadequate waste management of in transit migrants along the migration route, reception centers and transit areas across borders,

although it is expected to be positive, is difficult to quantify.

- Feedback shows that migrants also need other essential items from other sectors like Health items.
- Future sustainability of the service faces reduced funding, and a long-term strategy is needed to ensure its sustainability.
- The resale of items from traditional hygiene kits distribution, can be reduced with the customized modality, as beneficiaries acquire a sense of belonging and care for their selected items.

Next steps

- Although this mode of distribution is for migratory flows, the best way to increase the service capacity in terms of speed and volume of people served should be evaluated.
- Ensure that all service delivery points have sufficient physical space to carry out hygiene promotion and information activities.
- Increase the storage capacity of local warehouses, establishing synergies with entities and other actors.
- Establish mechanisms that facilitate the assessment of impact on solid waste management.
- Promote sustainability of the intervention by lobbying with government entities and the private sector, to ensure a transition to provision by government entities and / or the private sector.
- Evaluate how this initiative can be integrated into the Blueprint agreement established between UNHCR and UNICEF³.
- Analyze the convenience to have mobile Hygiene distribution facilities available, to be able to effectively address different places where population accumulates.
- In addition, as a result of this good practice it is being considered to add child protection essential items such as clothes and

umbrellas, without losing the hygiene corner essence.

Figure 10: Safe Hygiene Smiles for Children “Sonrisas de la Higiene segura para la infancia”. Credit: Saydel García, UNICEF Mexico



Credit: Saydel García, UNICEF Mexico

³ UNCHR-UNICEF Blueprint agreement is a commitment to accelerate joint efforts under a transformational agenda in line with the Global Compact on Refugees

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Acknowledgement

To all UNICEF WASH Colleagues who work every day in the humanitarian response of the offices in Colombia, Honduras, LACRO and Mexico, who participated in the development of this regional document, sharing their experiences and knowledge. The authors also thank the implementing partners, Pure Water for the World (PWW) in Honduras, Fundación Halü and Fundación para el Saneamiento, Ambiente, Higiene, Emprendimiento y Desarrollo Sostenible (SAHED) in Colombia, and Operación Bendición in Mexico, as their support has been key to the documentation and documentation of the implementation of personalized distribution for refugees and migrants in the Latin American and Caribbean Region.

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