

***Saving lives  
with clean safe  
care at birth***

# Soap Matters

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Issue 16

## Working with WaterAid in Myanmar

*In our last newsletter we reported on our upcoming work supporting WaterAid with a programme to improve maternity services in Myanmar. Here, Soapboxer Dr Sandra Virgo reports on her trip to Myanmar as part of this work:*

At the start of June, I flew to Yangon in Myanmar to help with preparation for a needs assessment of 30 health facilities as part of a project undertaken by WaterAid and funded by UNICEF and WHO, as well as local partners including the Burnet Institute.

It was the rainy season in the bustling city, which was full of tiny fragrant eateries, frantic traffic, new malls, many trees and lots of shrines, including the stunning Shwedagon Pagoda.

Our work took place at the Department of Medical Research over the course of five days. For the first three days WaterAid ran a workshop attended by individuals from the Ministry of Health, funding agencies, local data collectors, and regional stakeholders.

To help attendees understand why and how needs assessments can be useful, I gave a presentation on previous needs assessments conducted by Soapbox in

other countries. We then split the local data collectors into different groups and trained them on different skills: water quality testing; swab sampling; interviewing staff and patients; and completing water, sanitation and hygiene checklists. The researchers were extremely engaged in the training throughout, and many of them had clinical experience and therefore hands-on familiarity with the healthcare environment which aided their understanding.

After the training, the researchers then went off for a day and a half to practice collecting data and to see how the research tools worked in some 'pilot' facilities.

Finally, on the last afternoon, everyone came together again at the Department of Medical Research so that the researchers could let us know of any difficulties they had faced or any ways in which the research tools could be changed to make them easier to use. It was a very fruitful feedback session, and the WaterAid team and I made many notes of ways to make the researchers' jobs easier and the data even more accurate.

Since my return, we have been collaborating online to make those final tweaks, and the real needs assessment is set to start soon. We look forward to finding out the results!



Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, Myanmar

## Recent Publications

Gon, G., Ali, M., Towriss, C., Kahabuka, C., Ali, A. O., Cavill, S. et al. (2017) Unpacking the enabling factors for hand, cord, and birth surface hygiene in Zanzibar maternity units. *Health Policy & Planning* <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czx081>

Virgo, S., Gon, G., Cavallaro, F. L., Graham, W. & Woodd, S. (2017) Who Delivers Where? The effect of obstetric risk on facility delivery in East Africa. *Tropical Medicine & International Health*. Accepted Author Manuscript.

## Successful Pilot of Illustrated Cleaning Guidelines

Plans to pilot illustrated cleaning procedure guidelines developed for use in low-income country health facilities came to fruition in May when Dr Beverly Donaldson, long-standing colleague to Soapbox, introduced the guidelines to selected stakeholders in the Gambia. The illustrated guidelines, produced by local graphic artist, Keiran McDonald, were developed to provide an accessible reference for cleaning staff with poor literacy skills.

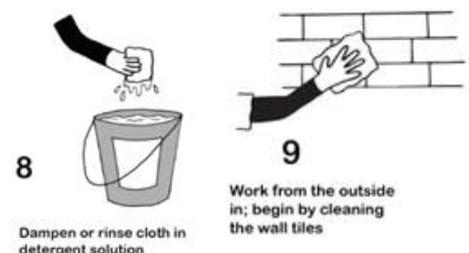
Cleaners, nurses, midwives and colleagues in the Ministry of Health subjected the illustrated guidelines to very practical scrutiny. They were assessed on whether they were easily understood,

conveyed an accurate message of best practice, and if they were considered to be a useful training and reference tool.

The feedback received was positive on all counts with some interesting differences between stakeholder groups. Staff who had been involved in previous environmental hygiene and infection prevention training, developed by Soapbox, found the illustrated guidelines straightforward to interpret. Those who had no prior formal training saw training either in the use of the guidelines or in wider environmental hygiene and infection prevention as a necessary prerequisite. The cleaning staff also requested the guidelines in a poster format to be displayed in appropriate areas, considering that this visual aid would prompt good

practice and act as a daily reminder.

The next stage of development has been to incorporate the feedback into an updated version of the guidelines. The ultimate aim is to develop universally applicable guidelines while addressing the challenge of ensuring they are adaptable to local contexts.



## Star Students

Since November last year we had the pleasure of two 3<sup>rd</sup> year medical students, Iyabo Adekunle-Olarinde and Lucy Singh, working with Soapbox on their intercalated BSc projects. Both projects focused on research in critical but understudied areas of maternal health, making important contributions to the field.

Iyabo conducted the Water@Birth study which looked at calculating the volume of water required for hand hygiene during childbirth in low-income countries. Hand hygiene is one of the key factors implicated in infection prevention, ensuring enough water is available for hand washing during childbirth in resource-poor settings is imperative. Iyabo conducted primary and secondary research in Aberdeen Maternity Hospital, UK and Felege Hiwot Referral Hospital (FHRF), Ethiopia.

## More Than A Medical Issue

On the 5th May, Soapbox hosted an extremely successful 'Powered by PechaKucha' event in celebration of the International Day of the Midwife with an evening of presentations at the Belmont Filmhouse, Aberdeen around the theme 'Maternal Health: More than a Medical Issue'.

PechaKucha means 'chit-chat' in Japanese and is a format by which speakers have just 20 images and 20 seconds per image (a total of 6 minutes and 40 seconds) to deliver their presentation and engage the audience.

We were privileged to have NHS Grampian's Jillian Evans to host the evening which was kicked off by Professor Susan Crowther, Professor of Midwifery at Robert Gordon University. Prof Crowther presented on the lives of midwives around the world and touched on her own experiences working internationally, highlighting the barriers and facilitators she has faced in delivering quality maternity care, with over 20 years of midwifery experience.

Soapbox's Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Wendy Graham, followed and discussed how health facility cleaning staff are often 'invisible' within their working environments, yet serve a vital role in preventing the spread of infection, a leading cause of maternal and newborn death. Yael Velleman, Senior Policy Analyst from WaterAid UK complemented the discussion by sharing her experiences of projects which work to deliver water, sanitation and hygiene to healthcare facilities globally.

University of Aberdeen medical students, Lucy Singh, Lucy Soudain and Sam Tweed all delivered fantastic presentations respectively on the struggle of refugees and migrants in accessing quality maternity care, the devastating impact of obstetric fistula in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, and on *Staphylococcus aureus* infection in the Gambia.

Concluding the presentations, Soapboxer Dr Sandra Virgo of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, shared our work in Malawi that we're conducting in partnership with WaterAid. Sandra discussed the needs assessments that have been applied to a number of maternity units across the country and some of the issues the project has faced along the way.



The event was a great success and enjoyed by all who attended, fuelling engaging discussions around the importance of quality care and the determination to support improvements in maternity care globally.

## Global Learning Event in Nepal

In April, Soapbox's Senior Programmes Officer, Suzanne Cross, attended the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in Healthcare Facilities (HCFs) Global Learning Event (GLE) hosted by WHO and UNICEF. The GLE focused on 'action' to improve WASH in HCFs and provided an opportunity for participants, at all levels, to share experiences and solutions and to jointly problem-solve barriers.

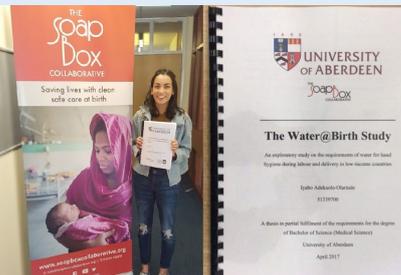
The three-days were filled with technical sessions, presentations and working groups, and sharing of case studies. Participants, from a diverse range of stakeholders from NGOs to Ministries of Health and country representatives from Afghanistan to Zambia, were provided with opportunities to network and learn from each other.

Soapbox delivered a presentation on the pilot of the cleaners training package which took place in the Gambia last year. There was a great deal of interest in the training and it was positive to see so many

stakeholders recognise the important role cleaners have to play in infection prevention to ensure healthcare environments are clean and safe.

It was also encouraging to see how Soapbox's work fits in to the larger picture of WASH in HCFs and the degree to which maternal and newborn health was highlighted throughout the meeting as an area of special concern.

Soapbox was delighted to have been part of such a successful event bringing together so many key players and we look forward to working together in the future to improve WASH in HCFs and work towards clean safe care at birth for all women and newborns.



Lucy's study looked at seasonality of births—peaks in births at different times of the year—and overcrowding in maternity units. Lucy analysed data from the Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey and data on deliveries at FHRF and spent time working on the data analysis with the support of our team at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Lucy also makes an important contribution to the field with implications for wider research into the seasonality of births and overcrowding and the related impact on quality of care and implications for resource planning in low-income settings.

Iyabo and Lucy's hard work paid off as they both received 'firsts' for their theses.

A big congratulations to both Lucy and Iyabo and we wish them both every success with their ongoing studies!