



A Study on Personal and Home Hygiene in Flood Prone Communities in the Philippines

by WASH Coalition Pilipinas

Objectives:

1. To find out about personal and home hygiene practices of people living in flood prone communities of the Bicol and Eastern Visayas regions of the Philippines.
 2. To identify specific advocacy efforts, actions and recommendations to be communicated to local governments, NGOs, communities and households.
- *Waray and Bicol are among 110 ethnic groups in the Philippines. They usually experience typhoons, floods, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes.*



RESULTS

Findings from field visits, interactions with household members, observations and focus group discussions



- **Sunlight is used as energizer and disinfectant.**

- People bask in the morning sun to be energized in body, mind and spirit.
- Personal and household items are taken out of the house daily to be exposed directly to sunlight and air.

- **Home hygiene is family-centered, focused on relationships with household members.**

- Includes a whole range of household practices for preventing diseases, accidents, misfortune and ill will.
- Relates to hand washing; food handling and preparation; laundry; safe disposal of human and other wastes; cleaning of toilet and bathroom; care of pets and livestock; care of sick family members; control of dust, molds and mildew; mental hygiene and harmonious relationships.

- **Home hygiene is directly linked to local architecture.**

- Houses usually have pyramidal thatched roof to withstand and deflect the wind and torrential rains.
- Windows are opened to allow air and sunlight inside the house; prevent growth of molds, mildew and other allergens; eliminate any unpleasant odor.
- Fragrant flowers like *sampaguita*, jasmine, and *camia* are planted near windows so that the breeze carries the fragrance inside the house.
- Many houses are built on posts and stilts above the ground to keep snakes and vermin away; also allows flood waters to pass through.
- Houses are made of light local materials to enable its occupants to survive earthquakes and typhoons.



Other Personal & Home Hygiene Practices

- Daily sweeping and wiping of surfaces.
- Kitchen and dining areas are cleaned after every meal.
- *Limonsito (calamansi)* used as disinfectant, cleansing agent.
- Drinking water is protected from contamination.
- The floor is kept clean as it is a multipurpose shared social space by day and a sleeping area at night. People walk barefoot inside the house so the floor remains clean.
- Fallen dried leaves are swept into a heap and burned during the early evening. The smoke controls pests and induces the flowering of fruit trees. Smoke that enters the house drives away mosquitoes.



Personal hygiene is closely linked to home hygiene. Collective daily ritual of: hand washing; bathing; changing clothes after each bath or when feeling dirty or sweaty; wearing clean clothes; using clean beddings, consuming clean food and water; safe disposal of waste; brushing the teeth; trimming the nails; rubbing the skin and hair with coconut oil; getting a regular hair cut; having a massage when fatigued; **keeping the mind and the emotions clean.**

Home hygiene is also about mental and emotional hygiene and the harmonious relationships of household members. **Caring for the young and the elderly** who are more prone to illnesses ensures that the rest of the household is healthy.



Personal Hygiene

- **The Waray and Bicol view personal hygiene as an investment for health.** One has to be in good health for emergency preparedness in communities prone to natural disasters.
- **During floods and other calamities:** Adults fast or reduce their food intake as resources typically dwindle during a calamity. Water use in the house is also reduced.
- **Taking a positive attitude during calamities is regarded as a means of mental hygiene.** Conflicts are avoided. Opportunities arise for story telling and learning from the elders some useful knowledge for survival as well as lessons in life. Story telling is also used as a means to prevent children from playing in flood waters.
- The notion is that if one can not have a clean house or a clean body because of a natural calamity, **having instead a clean mind or a high spirit must prevail.** People also resort to prayers as a form of **spiritual hygiene.** Several Waray expressions refer to emotional and spiritual strength, conveying the belief that nothing bad can last forever. Warays try to find something to celebrate in the face of adversities, building confidence as they survive or move on despite difficulties. After each calamity comes the restoration of houses and the communal cleaning up of surroundings.



Learnings

- **Home and personal hygiene of the Waray and the Bicol reflect a lifestyle borne out of indigenous knowledge and emergency preparedness** acquired over time and a continuous cycle of natural calamities. They would adapt well to climate change and to real or perceived future difficulties.
- **Home and personal hygiene are regarded as forms of social insurance.** The human body and the family dwelling are strengthened for emergency preparedness when resources and opportunities become scarce as a result of natural calamities.
- **Spiritual and emotional hygiene are recognized as special components of personal hygiene,** which provides strength and well being in trying times. A positive outlook that values harmonious relationships helps nurture social capital, which promotes community cohesiveness, that, in societies with not much cash, serve as an alternative to financial capital.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Document personal and home hygiene practices among the various other ethnic groups in the Philippines in order to find out about indigenous knowledge that could help enhance and sustain WASH programs.**
2. **Build upon local capability and indigenous knowledge in promoting hygiene and in mobilizing resources for safe and sustainable water supply and sanitation systems. This allows for various options, especially low-cost appropriate technologies that help sustain and promote hygiene behaviour.**
3. **Initiate strong partnerships between and among communities, local governments, NGOs and the academe in promoting and implementing WASH programs.**