

Creating a relevant, responsive public health campaign through adaptive programming

Tasked with transforming Tanzania's hygiene and sanitation practices, the CLEAR Consortium knew they would have to produce exciting and impactful messaging that addressed current attitudes and beliefs. Adaptive programming not only kept the campaign relevant and engaging, but gave it the flexibility to respond to unplanned and unprecedented events like the COVID-19 pandemic.

ADAPTIVE PROGRAMMING

In 2017, the Tanzanian government launched a national behaviour change campaign to encourage Tanzanians to construct improved toilets and practise handwashing with soap. Known as *Nyumba Ni Choo*, which roughly translates as 'a house is not complete without a proper toilet', the five-year campaign used insights from behavioural science and mass communications to instil improved hygiene practices and attitudes throughout Tanzania.

The size and scope of *Nyumba Ni Choo* presented the campaign team with a challenge: how to keep an audience motivated for five consecutive years? If messaging becomes too familiar or predictable, people will simply stop engaging with it, and the campaign will lose its ability to change behaviour. Given *Nyumba Ni Choo's* hugely important aim to transform hygiene and sanitation in Tanzania, it was vital that the campaign avoided stale messaging and audience fatigue.

The campaign team addressed this challenge with adaptive programming. Rejecting the linear planning models which have long defined project management, adaptive programming is a way of running a project so that it can respond in real time to changes in external circumstances as well as new information about the effectiveness of the project itself. In this way, adaptive programming better reflects the rapidly changing circumstances in which long-term projects are often implemented.

REVIEW, REFINE, REPEAT

Throughout *Nyumba Ni Choo's* five-year run, adaptive programming methods were used to continually monitor and update the campaign's behaviour change strategies. The campaign team hired external market research companies to conduct periodic nationwide surveys of



Nipo Tayari sought commitments from politicians and public figures to the upcoming campaign.

campaign engagement, as well as attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards hygiene and sanitation. From these surveys they produced quarterly evaluation reports to review implementation activities, audience reception and behavioural consequences. The campaign team also used the reports' findings to direct campaign activities for the coming months and modify sub-contractual relationships with service providers.

The flexibility this gave the campaign could be seen from the outset. In 2017, the Tanzanian government – concerned about the length of time between campaign design and implementation – asked the *Nyumba Ni Choo* team to bridge the gap with an introductory campaign that would build momentum for the upcoming initiatives. This led to the creation of *Nipo Tayari*, or 'I am ready', an outreach effort which successfully encouraged a wide range of politicians and development partners to publicly declare their readiness to support future hygiene and sanitation improvements.

Nipo Tayari proved to be the first of six campaign phases for *Nyumba Ni Choo*. By reflecting current conditions and attitudes in Tanzania, each phase was able to provide relevant and timely motivations and avoid messaging fatigue among the public. The campaign's third phase, *Tumetoka Mbali* ('We have come far'), for example, was specifically crafted to reward public participation in the hygiene and sanitation efforts and to remind them of the progress already made.

RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The biggest test of *Nyumba Ni Choo*'s adaptive programming came in early 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic swept the world. The campaign team were asked by the Tanzanian government and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office to quickly repurpose the *Nyumba Ni Choo* brand to promote hygiene and sanitation as a means of COVID-19 prevention. Abandoning a planned phase they were just about to launch, the campaign team sprang into action and created *Mikono Safi, Tanzania Salama* ('Clean hands, safe Tanzania'). Over the following 18 months, this would be followed by two further COVID-19-focussed phases, *Unategemewa* ('You are depended on') and *Siri Ya Ushindi* ('Secret to victory'). These phases became an integral part of the Tanzanian government's response to the pandemic and vaccine hesitancy.

By using *Nyumba Ni Choo*'s well-known and widely respected brand, as well as its established campaign infrastructure, the Tanzanian government was able to promote COVID-19 hygiene behaviours quickly and from a trusted source. Moreover, by maintaining its positive, motivational tone, *Nyumba Ni Choo*'s COVID-19 messaging provided a welcome contrast to the fear-based public health campaigns that dominated the early stages of the pandemic in most countries.

A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNING

By the time *Nyumba Ni Choo* ended in 2021, an impressive 97% of Tanzanians had heard of the campaign. Over its five-year run, nearly 6 million households – approximately 29 million Tanzanians – improved their latrines and installed handwashing facilities, and access to improved sanitation across the country increased from 42% to 70%.

Adaptive programming was central to these achievements. Not only did it allow the *Nyumba Ni Choo* campaign to keep its messaging fresh and impactful, but it provided the flexibility to respond to unplanned and unprecedented events like the COVID-19 pandemic and even incorporate them into the heart of its campaigning. *Nyumba Ni Choo*'s embrace of adaptive programming can serve as a model for future public health and other campaigns – both in Tanzania and globally.



Mikono Safi, Tanzania Salama was quickly developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



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You can find out more about the work done as part of this project at <https://nyumbanichoo.com/resources>

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