Community-based approaches and hygiene practices, the challenge of sustainability

One of the challenges many ILEP programmes face is how to help community members and people affected by leprosy to achieve lasting behaviour change. For some, especially those involved in NTD programmes, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) projects are a prime example. A recent evidence-based systematic review (on the topic of hygiene practices) has some useful insights. *(This review by the Campbell Collaboration is specifically focused on international development. It seeks to apply a broader, more realistic approach to what is included in a systematic review than those used in medical and scientific areas, while maintaining high levels of rigour).*

The review found that community based approaches to promoting handwashing and sanitation behaviour change can be effective. They found that community-based approaches were generally more effective than social marketing or messaging. They compared:

- Community based approaches are participatory. Community members are typically invited and there is shared decision-making. It works with the whole community, and usually includes community meetings.
- Social marketing uses commercial marketing techniques to change behaviour. It assumes that people both want to and are able to change their behaviour. A marketing approach uses “the 4 P’s”: Product (e.g. handwashing facility), Price (e.g. price of soap), Place (products need to be easily available) and promotion (e.g. encourage adoption of certain behaviours).
- Messaging is an information and educational approach. It is usually one-way communication, designed to help individuals and communities increase their knowledge and/or skills.
- Theory-based interventions start with behavioural and planned action theories. They try to apply behavioural factors (e.g. knowledge, feelings, social pressure) to change individual behaviour.

Their findings are summarised in this helpful infographic below. Read the Plain Language Summary or the Full Review here.