

**MUM’S MAGIC HANDS – A programme developed by Oxfam and Lifebuoy, Unilever’s health soap, to encourage handwashing with soap at key times in emergency affected communities to prevent the spread of diseases.**



### Partnership overview

The partnership between Oxfam and Lifebuoy brings together Oxfam’s humanitarian and public health response experience and Lifebuoy’s behaviour change and communications expertise to demonstrate the positive difference a public-private sector partnership can make in promoting health in vulnerable populations.

- Prior to developing Mum’s Magic Hands, we carried out formative research and looked at what the barriers and motivators are to handwashing with soap after three emergency situations in the Philippines, Pakistan and Nepal.
- While there were varying motivators across the three research groups, there were two common motivating factors – **Nurture** (supporting and encouraging children to develop into successful adults) **and Affiliation** (the desire to fit in with others or be regarded as a contributing member of the community). These two factors were predominantly used along with the communication channels available in emergency situations, to create Mums Magic Hands.

The initial materials were pretested in The Philippines and Nepal, amended based on feedback and then trialled in Kirtipur, Nepal.

### Programme implementation

The programme set out to test health and emotional motivators (nurture and affiliation) around handwashing in post-emergency settings in order to encourage improved handwashing with soap at home and in the community. There is little documented evidence to date on the use of these emotional motivators in emergencies.

- Mum’s Magic Hands was targeted primarily at mothers and female caregivers; it was piloted for 6 weeks in Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal, following the 2015 earthquake.
- Programme participants attended 4 group sessions over 6 weeks; overall, participation rates were high and an average of 889 mothers attending the sessions, with 98% of mothers completing the programme.
- Mum’s Magic Hands consists of a number of visual materials, nudges and activities to encourage and or trigger handwashing with soap. The following proved most popular among mothers:
  - Mum’s Magic Hands **storyboard** is used in group sessions to raise awareness of the importance of handwashing with soap. It tells the story of a mother and her heroic efforts to nurture her daughter with her magic hands. Against all odds and despite the difficult conditions of an emergency context, she is able to instill good handwashing habits in her child which leads to her daughter’s ultimate success in life.



Figure 1: Mum’s Magic Hands key visual showing a mother and daughter practicing handwashing with soap.

- **Coloured powder exercises** demonstrating that “visibly clean is not necessarily clean” and the importance of using soap to remove invisible germs. By using coloured powder demonstrations, Mum’s Magic Hands can help the women understand the difference between hands washed with soap and hands washed only with water – this proved to be a strong motivator for change among the target group.
- **Scratch card** serving as a method to self-monitor handwashing practices in the home; the card includes a handwashing story beneath the overlay. Mothers remove one scratch card square per day with their child (to be scratched only when proper handwashing with soap is practiced at two key times by both mother and child) ultimately revealing the next part of the story until the full story is complete.
- **Circle of cleanliness** to reinforce the importance of handwashing with soap through social pressure and establish affiliation and group norm – by using a circle drawn in coloured powder to represent a clean area where mothers could only enter upon washing their hands.
- **Bedtime tale**, a contest among participants to develop handwashing with soap bedtime stories for their children, reinforcing the importance of a mother’s role in ensuring children develop good handwashing habits.



Figure 2: Nepalese boy holding completed scratch card with Mum’s Magic Hands story images.

The materials were piloted in a post emergency-context to prevent diseases associated with lack of handwashing with soap.

## Results

Results show an increase in (a) awareness of washing hands with soap before eating and cooking (b) increase in practice of handwashing with soap before eating, cooking, and after toilet; the latter was likely due to the fact that HWWS after toilet was already high.

- Overall, the programme had a positive effect on mothers’ handwashing practice. The percentage of mothers who mentioned handwashing with soap before eating as a key occasion increased by 45%; surpassing the 7% objective. The number of mothers observed to wash hands with soap before eating increased by 18%; 8% higher than the programme objective.
- Other programme successes include an increase in handwashing with soap knowledge and practice before preparing food (28% and 17% respectively), and a 45% increase in mothers observed to wash hands with soap after using the toilet, likely due to increased access to soap, water and handwashing facilities.
- Nurture as a key theme was well understood from programme materials and a significant motivating factor among mothers, while affiliation was less apparent to programme participants.
- Since the Nepal trials, a robust suite of materials and training guide has been developed for use by other non-governmental and governmental agencies in the humanitarian sector. Additionally, we are continuing to test the programme in other countries with the aim of gathering additional evidence and learnings which we can share more broadly.

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