

Urban Health Initiative

a model process for catalysing change

Air pollution: communications to promote health

Communications and outreach to policy-makers and the wider public are essential to mobilize and sustain support for policy solutions to air pollution and bring the needed health, environment and economic benefits.

A global campaign for clean air

Communication is central to addressing air pollution. It cannot be an afterthought. #BreatheLife has mobilized over 75 cities, regions and countries to protect health and climate from the effects of air pollution via a four-part strategy:

- **Connect cities:** provide a platform for cities to share best practices and demonstrate progress in their journey to meeting WHO air quality targets.
- **Increase monitoring:** work with cities to expand monitoring efforts that can keep citizens informed and facilitate sustainable urban development.
- **Accelerate solutions:** build demand for new solutions that work and support municipalities in effectively implementing them in their own cities.
- **Engage individuals:** articulate technical knowledge to raise awareness among citizens the burden air pollution poses to our health and the climate, and provide ways to take action locally and globally to ensure policy makers implement plans to improve air quality and health.

Target audiences

- **General public:** social media-connected, parents concerned about children's health, and students; build a global communications platform to promote new data and content that tells the global story of air pollution and health.
- **Local and national policy-makers:** pledge to join the #BreatheLife network; use country-driven tools and communications approaches; adapt global material and scale up local campaigns; share local stories globally to demonstrate progress and a sense of what is possible.
- **Health sector:** policy-makers, community health workers and specialists in cardiopulmonary disease and cancer engaged as influencers; sensitize health and environment sectors to the health and climate impacts of air pollution; build capacity to lead publicly on these issues with informed views on the problems and the solutions.

#BreatheLife rallies cities, regions and countries to act for cleaner air, and serves as a platform to showcase and share efforts towards this common goal.

#BreatheLife Accra combines data generated using Urban Health Initiative technical tools with messages resonating at individual and community level to drive policy solutions.



Community leaders in Accra at a meeting of Urban Health Initiative stakeholders.

Photo: Kobby Blay

PILOT PROJECT

TACKLING AIR POLLUTION IN ACCRA, GHANA

Communicating air pollution solutions

Awareness raising of community members on the health impacts of air pollution from polluting household fuels and technology, illegal dumping and waste burning is critical to inspire behaviour change and build political momentum for policy change in Accra.

Following a series of communications workshops, convened by the WHO Country Office for Ghana, Accra Metropolitan Assembly, Ghana Health Service, School Health and Education Programme, Ghana Coalition of NGOs in Health, along with the local media and NGOs, an Urban Health Initiative Communications Task Team was formed to launch #BreatheLife Accra, targeting communities, schools and health facilities in three streams:

- **Waste:** sensitization of teachers and school children on waste segregation and recycling by distributing colour-coded waste bins, and creating a WhatsApp platform to report illegal dumping and open burning.
- **Household energy:** health workers sensitized on the health impacts of polluting household energy and technology, and provided with relevant information to advise parents on the impact of exposure to household smoke on childhood pneumonia.

Communications to local residents ensure citizens can hold policy makers accountable for decisions to improve air quality.

- **Green spaces:** launch of Adopt a Space, with private sponsorship of beautification projects, and restoration and greening of 26 open spaces.

Priorities for communication

As part of the communications and outreach component of the Urban Health Initiative, four communities are involved, including the coastal community of Jamestown, one of Accra's oldest districts; Agbogbloshie, a commercial district which includes the city's largest e-waste dump; the coastal fishing community of Chorkor; and Mamprobi, a suburb north east of Chorkor.

- **Health workers outreach** has been a priority of the communications activities in Accra. Education information for patients has been shared in health facilities – engaging community health workers, school health education coordinators, environmental health workers and Ghana Health Service staff.
- **Community schools** have also been targeted. The School Health Education Programme of the Ghana Education Service has organized sessions with school health managers, principals and school teachers to promote the creation of green spaces and tree planting in schools in target communities.
- **Town hall meetings and community durbars** have been organized to sensitize the general public on the health consequences of burning rubbish and e-waste and the benefits of using clean cookstoves.
- **Informal sector workers** including street vendors, fish smokers, and waste collectors perform high risk types of work and have been engaged to understand the impacts of air pollution.

