Many families in Rwanda struggle to ensure that their drinking water is safe. Even if it is clean at the source, it can be contaminated during transport and storage in the home. Access to safe drinking water is challenging, particularly with 80% of residents living in rural areas and 60% in extreme poverty. Seventy percent of rural residents and 57% of urban dwellers lack access to improved sources. Despite the lack of safe drinking water, a culture of water treatment does exist, with over 60% treating their water. Of those who treat, 42.3% boiled their water rather than using a chemical product such as bleach, permanganate or Sûr’Eau.

With 1 in 10 Rwandan children expected to die before age five, Rwanda has one of the highest under-five mortality rates in the world. Diarrhea, a problem caused by unsafe water and lack of hygiene and sanitation, is the second leading cause of death in children under five. In the two weeks prior to the country’s last demographic household survey, 13.7% of children under five had had diarrhea.

To help address these problems, PSI partnered with Abt Associates to implement USAID’s Point-of-Use Water Disinfection and Zinc Treatment (POUZN) project. Evidence shows that point-of-use (POU) water treatment reduces diarrhea from 30 to 50% in the most vulnerable populations: children under five and people living with HIV/AIDS. These household water treatment and safe storage interventions, which can be implemented rapidly, are an important complement to broader water, sanitation and hygiene interventions.

WHAT WE SET OUT TO DO

In 2007, the POUZN project in Rwanda sought to reduce diarrhea morbidity and mortality in children under five by increasing access to and demand for POU water treatment products by expanding PSI’s existing household water treatment program. The PSI team aimed to:

- Create sustainable and expanded access to Sûr’Eau in the public and private sectors;
- Improve knowledge of proper hygiene, water storage and treatment solutions to prevent diarrhea;
- Increase proper and sustained use of Sûr’Eau in households with children under five; and
- Disseminate safe water messages and products to people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA).

To achieve these goals, PSI leveraged its existing public and private sector relationships to streamline and significantly expand its product distribution system. PSI diversified its distribution partners, which included commercial/pharmaceutical sector, public sector health clinics, community health workers, NGOs and community-based organizations, PLWHA associations, and community health insurance providers (mutuelles de santé). PSI developed a new communication campaign called “Good Life” focused on the notion that Sûr’Eau offers caregivers comfort and peace of mind when they treat their water. PSI complemented its mass media campaign with interpersonal communication techniques, increasing the impact of its efforts.

WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED

PSI made significant gains in POU water treatment availability and use in Rwanda. Through its effective partnerships with the public and private sectors, PSI put Sûr’Eau into local shops and caregivers’ hands around the country, achieving near universal coverage in urban areas (99.5%) and reaching just less than half that in rural areas. With such high coverage, usage rates increased dramatically. A 2010 survey showed the proportion of those who had ever used Sûr’Eau had doubled since 2007, from 20% to 40%. Moreover, 19% of survey respondents in 2010 reported using Sûr’Eau in the last 24 hours to treat their water.
The pilot districts where PSI collaborated with mutuelles de santé also demonstrated significant increases in Sûr’Eau usage. PSI’s efforts resulted in a 22% increase in consistent self-reported use of Sûr’Eau in these districts, with 21% of them reporting consistent use versus only 2% in the areas not reached by the PSI team. Similarly, there was a 41% increase in those households reporting ever using Sûr’Eau; 60% of those touched by PSI’s efforts had ever used the product compared to about 11% in the areas not participating in the program.

Knowledge about diarrhea and how to prevent it also increased significantly due to the POUZN campaign. In 2010, 64% of households surveyed had been exposed to diarrhea prevention messages in the previous six months. Compared to the 2007 baseline survey, significantly more people in 2010 could identify Sûr’Eau, its uses and the main causes of diarrhea just three years later. More than half (53%) of surveyed caregivers knew where they could purchase Sûr’Eau compared to 23% in 2007.

**WHAT WE LEARNED**

- **Leverage government leadership to ensure program success.**
  The government’s ownership of the program contributed immensely to the increase in use of Sûr’Eau. Making Sûr’Eau available at government clinics and leveraging community health workers for product distribution and promotion helped PSI reach its rural audience.

- **Integrate the program into the health system and leverage multiple distribution channels to increase coverage and use rates.**
  PSI successfully incorporated the mutuelles de santé system as well as existing community- and faith-based organizations into its outreach and product distribution efforts. In addition, PSI’s strong collaboration with the government ensured POU messaging and products were promoted by community health workers and made available at government clinics. Such integration increased access and POU awareness, and generated social support and demand.

- **Establish a streamlined wholesaler-retailer distribution network in the public and private sectors.**
  PSI vastly improved the efficiency of its distribution system by integrating wholesalers into its network. By distributing POU products through private wholesalers and the government pharmaceutical distributor instead of delivering them directly to vendors and health clinics, PSI expanded the availability of Sûr’Eau.

- **Understand your target audience in order to successfully promote the Sûr’Eau brand.**
  Based on initial findings showing social norms and perceived lack of availability as the biggest barriers to POU product use, PSI chose messages and spokespeople that would dispel these barriers. PSI partnered with community leaders and organizations, as well as community health workers, to build social support for Sûr’Eau and to tell people where to find it. Messages successfully appealed to caregivers’ desire to ensure the well-being of their children.

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Notes:

1. Numbers sharing the same letters are not significantly different from one another. Numbers not sharing the same letter(s) are significantly different (p<.05)
2. Exposure means heard or saw a message about diarrhea in the last 6 months
3. Did not collect information about current use of Sur Eau in baseline survey.

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