

Peer Review

Review of: "Evaluation of Nyumba Ni Choo: A National Campaign to Promote Improved Sanitation in Tanzania Between 2016–2020"

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This paper presents a timely and compelling evaluation of the Tanzanian government's National Sanitation Campaign (2016–2020), offering valuable insights into how large-scale public health initiatives can achieve substantial behavioral change without financial subsidies. The significant increase in coverage of improved sanitation facilities—from 43% to 72% in just five years—is an impressive outcome, especially considering the resource-constrained context. The high level of program awareness (97%) reflects a remarkable degree of national outreach and suggests successful dissemination strategies.

One of the strengths of the study lies in its attention to the campaign's theory of change. By clearly articulating a dual-audience strategy—targeting both households and government officials—the paper acknowledges the multi-level nature of sanitation governance and behavior change. This layered approach appears to have been integral to the campaign's success, with both direct emotional engagement at the household level and political commitment at the administrative level contributing synergistically to the observed outcomes.

The use of emotional appeals is particularly noteworthy. Rather than relying on economic incentives or coercive policies, the campaign employed persuasive, affect-driven communication. This not only aligns with contemporary behavioral science research but also demonstrates a culturally sensitive, human-centered design that respects household agency while motivating action. The paper could be strengthened by further detailing the types of emotions evoked (e.g., pride, disgust, aspiration) and how these were operationalized in campaign materials.

A further commendable aspect is the study's focus on implementation fidelity and participant reaction. These dimensions are often underreported in evaluations of large-scale interventions, yet they are critical to understanding not just *what* works, but *how* and *why*. The authors' suggestion that high fidelity and positive reception were instrumental in driving behavior change invites more granular discussion—what mechanisms or structures ensured consistent implementation across diverse regions?

Despite its strengths, the paper would benefit from more explicit discussion of measurement methods. For example, how was sanitation coverage measured, and what definitions or indicators were used to define "improved" facilities? Similarly, the basis for the high awareness rate (97%) could be clarified—was this self-reported, and if so, how was bias minimized? Transparency in these methodological choices would enhance the study's credibility and replicability.

Moreover, while the campaign's success is clearly documented, the paper does not sufficiently explore the sustainability of these outcomes. Are there follow-up data on whether the improved sanitation behaviors and infrastructure have been maintained post-2020? Given the risk of regression in the absence of continued reinforcement, a discussion on the campaign's long-term impact and plans for institutionalization would add depth to the analysis.

Another area for improvement is the absence of a detailed equity analysis. The aggregated national statistics are impressive, but do they mask regional disparities or differences by socioeconomic status, gender, or rural/urban location? Understanding who benefited most—and who may have been left behind—would provide important lessons for future campaigns aiming for inclusive impact.

Furthermore, while the non-subsidy model is a bold and potentially replicable choice, it raises important ethical and policy questions. To what extent can persuasion alone address systemic barriers, such as affordability, infrastructure, or water access? The paper could benefit from a more critical examination of where persuasion may fall short and how it might be effectively complemented by structural investments in underserved communities.

From a theoretical standpoint, the paper hints at the relevance of behavioral economics and social norms theories but does not fully engage with these frameworks. A deeper integration of behavioral science literature would help situate the Tanzanian experience within broader global discourses on behavior change and public health communication. This would also support cross-contextual learning for similar campaigns in other low- and middle-income countries.

In conclusion, this paper provides a rich case study of a large-scale, persuasion-based sanitation campaign that achieved significant results without direct subsidies. Its strengths lie in its clear theory of change, strategic targeting, emotional engagement, and emphasis on implementation fidelity. However, further elaboration on methods, sustainability, equity, and theoretical grounding would enhance the robustness and applicability of its findings. Overall, the study makes a valuable contribution to the evidence base on public health interventions and offers promising directions for future research and policy development.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.