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**LOCAL ACTION WITH INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO IMPROVE AND  
SUSTAIN WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES**

**Innovative sanitation social movement:  
experiences from Nepal**

*K. Adhikari, H. N. Acharya, T. Ahmad & S. Shrestha (Nepal)*

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*Sanitation sector in Nepal remained a low priority till 2010. From 2010, the Government of Nepal prioritized sanitation and hygiene through creating enabling policy environment, inclusive planning, decentralized service delivery arrangement, and transforming sanitation promotion to social movement. The sanitation and hygiene master plan developed in 2011 provided a clear road map as well as set a national target of achieving universal access to improved sanitation by 2017. Social sanitation movement included triggering through school and community led interventions, socio-cultural festivals, sector triggering, decentralized governance, multi-sector collaboration and pro-active engagement of grass-root level actors. As a result access to improved sanitation increased dramatically from 43% in 2010 to 87% in 2016. Despite the huge progress, Nepal has to address a number of issues related to disparity in sanitation coverage and poor hygiene behaviors. There is a strong need of social norms for eliminating certain cultural dogmas especially around menstrual hygiene.*

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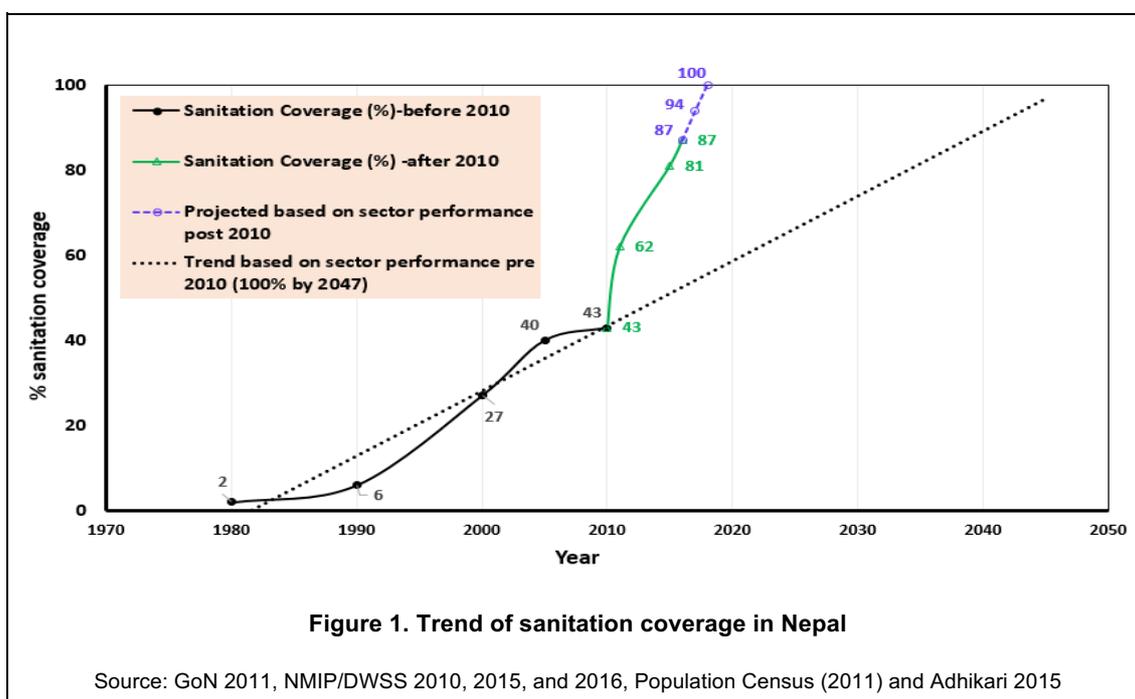
## **Introduction**

Nepal is a federal democratic state. This is the country of the Mount Everest and birthplace of Lord Buddha. The Government of Nepal has set a national target of universal access to basic water supply and sanitation by 2017. The Ministry of Water Supply and Sanitation (MoWSS) and the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage (DWSS) are the lead Ministry and Department for the sector respectively. Water Users' and Sanitation Committees are key community based structures. The government is collaborating with UN agencies, development partners and private sector agencies to promote the Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector activities. The Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan 2011 is a key document on sanitation and hygiene and it set a target of attaining universal access to sanitation by 2017 (i.e., 100% toilet coverage by 2017). The Master Plan has institutionalized the government-led National Sanitation and Hygiene Steering Committee, National Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committee and regional, district, municipality and Village Development Committee level WASH Coordination Committees in collaboration with the different development sector actors. These multi-sector stakeholders' institutions have promoted sanitation social movement. The Master Plan has recommended four sequential action steps for promoting hygiene and sanitation. These included (i) institutional building, (ii) planning and programming, (iii) ODF campaigning and behaviour Change, and (iv) post ODF campaigning (i.e., total sanitation). (GoN 2011). For accelerating the ODF and sanitation social movement, the role of National Sanitation Week, school and community led total sanitation program approaches and triggering activities are instrumental. These days, sanitation has been recognized as the basis of health, dignity and development.

## **Sanitation status and achievements**

Figure 1 shows trend of sanitation coverage in Nepal since 1980. It can be seen clearly from this figure that Nepal witnessed a very low rate of progress from 1980 to 2010 i.e., 41 % increase in 30 years. Projection based on this rate of progress shows that Nepal could have achieved 100% coverage by 2047. However, the actual rate of progress dramatically increased since 2010 with Nepal achieving 87% access to improved sanitation in 2016 from 43% in 2010 i.e., 44% increase in the last 6 years and with this rate of progress

Nepal may achieve 100% coverage to improved sanitation services by 2018 as can be seen from the projection shown in the figure (DWSS, 2016). In addition, data from the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage (DWSS) confirms that 38 of 75 districts, 2,388 of 3,157 Village Development Committees, 131 of 217 municipalities and 2 of 14 zones have been declared as ODF by 2016. This progress in sanitation coverage is due to scaling up of sanitation social movement stimulated by convergence of the efforts and resources of the government and the sector actors, increasing political commitments, enforcement of social norms and local body's leadership. The sector innovations have further refuelled the dynamics of the sector activities. The diarrhoea epidemics of 2009 in Jajarkot, Rukum and other Hill districts in the Mid-Western and Far-Western development regions of Nepal had largely triggered the government, politician, policy makers, UN agencies, development partners and people for sanitation development. The regional conferences held in Surkhet in 2010 and Nepalgunj in 2011 have provided important learning to strengthen the cross-sector collaboration in the region and beyond. Nevertheless, the hygiene promotion aspect still remains as grey area in Nepal.



## WASH sector innovations

The following are some of the key WASH sector innovations and processes that have worked as success factors for dramatic increase in access to improved sanitation services under sanitation social movement in Nepal:

- Master plan on sanitation:** The Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan 2011 has institutionalized decentralized and unified planning, financing, implementation and monitoring arrangements. The Master Plan has set the nine points guiding principles on sanitation that helped pooling of resources and maintaining uniformity and standard in sanitation and hygiene interventions and scale up sanitation social movement. The guiding principles include ODF as a bottom line of all sanitation interventions, local body's leadership, municipality and Village Development Committees as the basis unit of the sanitation intervention and mobilization of local resources.
- School Led Total Sanitation:** The School Led Total Sanitation approach is Nepal's unique innovation. This approach (introduced in 2006) has contributed to bring local bodies on board, promote the child, gender and differently-abled friendly WASH facilities in school, strengthen local level planning and documentation, develop school as a model institution in sanitation and empower students as the catalyst of change. Further, its role is instrumental to cultivate student's proper hygiene behaviors, reduce girl's drop-out rate, enhance quality education, introduce positive and appreciative triggering and community

sensitization tools, establish reward and recognition mechanisms, promote child friendly local governance and achieve ODF in school's catchments through participatory learning process;

- **Multi-sector collaboration:** This unique institutional arrangement of National Sanitation and Hygiene Steering Committee, National Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committee, and WASH coordination committees at sub-national levels have strengthened inclusion of cross-sector actors, promoted ownership, pooled local resources, minimized duplication of efforts, built collective ownership and synergized efforts for promoting the WASH sector activities in a unified manner;
- **Decentralized planning:** The WASH coordination committees formulate WASH plan to achieve ODF, total sanitation and water supply targets through stakeholders' collaboration. The WASH planning process includes intensive interaction among cross-sector stakeholders, mapping of their resources, scanning of opportunities and challenges, identification of practical actions and social norms and framing of the joint monitoring process. This arrangement has sensitized local bodies to allocate resources, empowered stakeholders and sought their collective ownership for sector convergence and established the social norms that open defecation is a crime. Based on such experience, the integrated water resource management plan and city sanitation plan are also becoming popular in Nepal;
- **Grass-root level stakeholders in action:** The grass-root level actors and institutions like female community health volunteer, ward citizen's forum, local clubs, youth, mass media people, sanitation commandos, micro-finance institutions, saving credit group, mothers' groups, community forestry users' groups, masons, shop keepers, indigenous healers, social and leaders, priests, sister organizations of the political parties and school's catchments and ward level WASH coordination committees have been effectively engaged in sanitation actions. Their contribution is instrumental for conducting baseline survey, formulating and enforcing social norms and plan of action, conducting mass sensitization activities, running sanitation festivals and conferences, performing door-to-door visits, collection of charity funds, supporting poor and disadvantaged communities and undertaking monitoring and ODF verification activities;
- **Cross-sector learning, monitoring and documentation:** The Joint Sector Review, ODF and total sanitation initiatives have cultivated collaborative culture, reinforced learning alliance and promoted evidence based planning and intervention in the WASH sector. For example, the WASH Sector Status Report published in 2011 and 2014 and quarterly newsletter on sanitation have documented precious sectoral learning and provided practical inputs to promote the sector policies and governance. Similarly, the local level self-monitoring mechanism engage grass-root level groups that guide and monitor communities to use sanitation facilities, upgrade them and wash hand with soap at the critical times;
- **Indigenous triggering approaches and tools:** The innovative approach of 'sector triggering' (triggering of different development sector actors) widely adopted in the WASH sector has helped strengthen broad based alliance, wider sectoral linkages, comprehensive planning, effective community mobilization, massive cost-sharing and resource pooling arrangements and intensive political mobilization (Adhikari, 2015). The application of other indigenous tools like granting additional marks to students using toilets in their homes, enforcement of social norms and penalty, student's competition on hand washing with soap, use of snake and ladder game on sanitation, dissemination of socio-culturally appealing slogans, sharing of heart touching songs, stories and audio-visual materials and dissemination of successful cases have also given profound impacts to trigger sanitation social movement
- **WASH Summit:** Since 2012 the Federation of Water Users and Sanitation Nepal has been organizing the WASH summit every two years in collaboration with the government, UNICEF, Water Aid Nepal and stakeholders. This event has contributed to solicit the key issues of the sector governance, pronounce the voice of the grass-root level stakeholders, facilitate dialogue between policy makers and people, document local level learning and empower the users;
- **WASH Conference:** This was introduced for the first time in Achham district in 2013, the WASH conference is being replicated nationwide gradually. The national, regional, district, municipality and Village Development Committee levels conferences have become effective means to collectively comprehend sectoral challenges and bottlenecks, assess local resources, cross-fertilize ideas, promote innovations, identify proper actions, synergize efforts and run ODF campaign. The joint-declaration of the conference has triggered multi-sector stakeholders' collaborative action so that ODF campaign in Nepal has gained considerable momentum and mileage;
- **Learning workshop:** The national level learning workshop organized by the Global Sanitation Fund programme of UN-Habitat Nepal in 2013 has comprised of display of hardware sanitation products and

sharing of program approaches, success stories and photographs. This workshop and similar events have enabled learning which has brought effectiveness in the programme process and service delivery;

- **WASH Expo:** The DWSS in collaboration with UNICEF, WASH sector stakeholders and private organizations organized the first historical WASH Expo in 2015 with a theme titled 'alliance building for innovation and change in WASH'. The Expo was held in the premises of the National Water Supply and Sanitation Training Center and attended by some 1500 persons. Different WASH technologies, research documents, printed materials and documentaries, project based learning and sector innovations were shared on the occasion. This historical event cultivated the collaborative culture among stakeholder for achieving better sector outcomes through learning, network building and expanding business relation;
- **WASH Resource Centers:** The sector development partners have established the WASH resource center in collaboration with the government and WASH coordination committees. The national and sub-national level resource centers have become useful avenues for collecting, exhibiting and sharing models, manuals, data and information on WASH. These have also maintained archives, retained institutional memory and promoted learning alliance;
- **Photo and poster exhibition:** The DWSS and WHO collaborated with the Majhgaon Secondary School at Darechowk in Chitwan district and engaged students to collect photographs on community sanitation, environmental cleanliness, performance of school level child clubs and application of human urine in crops with their critical analysis in the posters. This documentation process sensitized teachers, members of local clubs, local farmers, private entrepreneurs, women groups and communities about the importance ecological sanitation. Similar interactive events held in the locality and beyond have advocated the importance of ecological sanitation toilets and helped scale-up the ODF campaign;
- **Sanitation café:** This interactive workshop held with support of SNV Nepal in low sanitation coverage Tarai districts like Mahottari and Sarlahi in 2015 facilitated in-depth interaction between members of WASH coordination committees and private entrepreneurs about consumer preference and supply chain analysis. This avenue provided the practical insights to frame the result-oriented actions for stimulating ODF initiatives in those districts;
- **WASH fellowship:** Water Aid Nepal, Nepal Water for Health and the sector stakeholders offer WASH fellowship to the mass media people engaged in disseminating WASH related news, views, case studies and success stories. Such fellowship is also granted to the university graduates for undertaking research on the WASH sector themes;
- **Support to ultra-poor and disadvantaged communities:** Nepal's sanitation social movement has ensured support to ultra-poor, disabled, elderly people, single women and socially disadvantaged groups through self-help initiatives. For example, Mr. Bhup Bahadur Sah of Saudiyar Village Development Committees in Dang district became the hero of generosity donating toilet pans to his disabled villagers. This innovative concept of *Daanbir* was first introduced time in Dang district is becoming popular in the entire country and it has helped reach the un-reached and serve the un-served. Such donation and support also comprises of materials like sand, aggregate, bricks, wages, bamboo, wood and concrete rings;
- **Reward and recognition:** The title such as the 'sanitation ambassador' and 'sanitation champion' as well as declaration of 'clean school', 'healthy homes' and 'clean village' are some of the reward and recognition mechanisms. The publication of success stories, felicitation of individual with the letter of appreciation and cash prize and public recognition of the best toilet promoter are recognized in national sanitation campaign. The reward and recognition has raised stakeholders' zeal and confidence to stimulate sanitation social movement in Nepal.
- **Others:** Public hearing on WASH related activities; issuance of sanitation card to individuals as part of sensitization; use of mobile WASH Van equipped with messages and tools; and construction of models to demonstrate different technologies; group handwashing in schools; use of local fairs and festivals for promotion of sanitation; and request letter to households by the relevant authorities for construction of toilets were also found to be very effective under the social movement.

## WASH sector challenges

Though expansion of national sanitation coverage in the last 6 years is very encouraging, there are significant disparities exist in sanitation coverage among different development regions, ecological regions, rural and urban areas, different social groups and poverty quintiles. In absence of latest disaggregated data, the pattern of Open Defecation (OD) in the country is shown in Figure 2 using older data from MICS Survey conducted from February 2014 to June 2014. This figure clearly shows that OD is predominant in Tarai

region and particularly among Tarai Dalit communities where 79% of household practices OD as compared to 2% in Newar ethnic group. Interestingly OD is also more prevalent amongst middle and second wealth quintiles (i.e., 49 % and 41% respectively) than poorest quintile (22%) clearly suggesting that OD is not always directly linked to poverty.

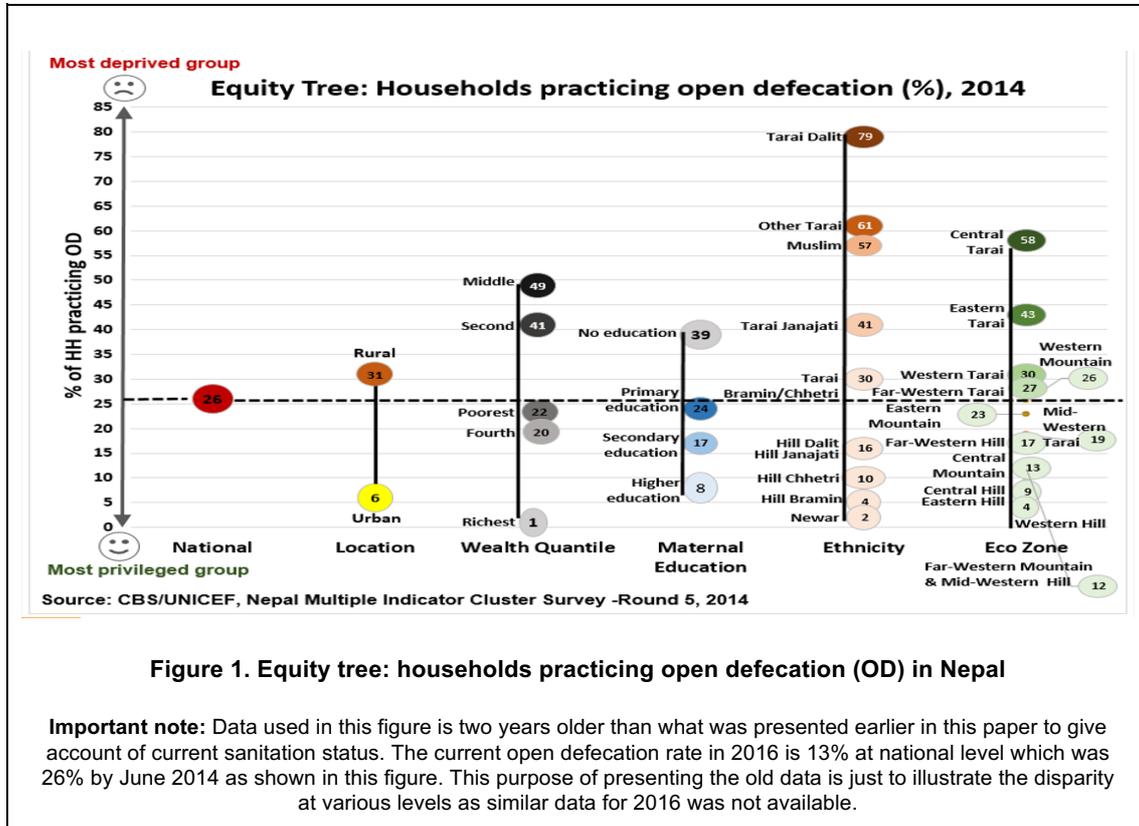


Figure 1. Equity tree: households practicing open defecation (OD) in Nepal

**Important note:** Data used in this figure is two years older than what was presented earlier in this paper to give account of current sanitation status. The current open defecation rate in 2016 is 13% at national level which was 26% by June 2014 as shown in this figure. This purpose of presenting the old data is just to illustrate the disparity at various levels as similar data for 2016 was not available.

As OD in Nepal at national level reduced from 26% in June 2014 to 13% in 2016, the gap amongst different ethnic groups and quintiles must have reduced but the pattern of disparity is expected to remain the same. Latest data from DWSS (2016) shows that access to improved sanitation in 8 districts of Tarai Region is 55% as compared to 87% at the national level for 75 districts confirming the disparity pattern.

Another challenge is facing the sanitation sector is the slippage in use of toilet and hand washing with soap even in ODF declared areas. The current internal monitoring mechanism of DWSS does not include an allowance for the slippage. The major reason for this could be attributed to weak capacity of the department for tracking the slippage. The ODF sustainability study conducted in 2016 revealed that there was a slippage of 3.5%. These were the families who were defecating in open especially when they are away from home (School of Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Research, 2016). Nepal Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014 showed that households where hand washing facilities were not present had a higher risk of E. coli in their drinking water (81%) compared to the households having hand washing facilities (66%) (CBS and UNICEF 2014). Elimination of OD and ensuring access to safely managed sanitation services as per SDG framework are the major challenges for urban sanitation. Data from Census (2011) and MICS (2014) shows that OD in urban area decreased from 9% in 2011 to 6% in 2016. The sector has to come up with innovative and localised solution to address open defecation in urban areas especially slums and peri-urban areas. The earthquake of 2015 has also posed a big barrier to achieve the ODF status in earthquake affected districts where about 220,000 toilets were destroyed. It will take time for reconstruction of permanent toilets as the earthquake severely jeopardized the resources and capacities of the affected people.

### Summary and way forward

Nepal is a very diverse country in terms of socio-demographic and physical features which requires diverse approaches, methods and tools for sanitation improvement. These are well reflected in Nepal's sanitation social movement which relied on using diversified and innovative approaches and tools for sanitation

promotion meeting local requirements. As explained earlier, the sanitation social movement resulted in achieving remarkable progress. Integration of sanitation with local level planning, financing, implementation and monitoring arrangement has strengthened service delivery. Similarly, linkage of sanitation with other development interventions has helped cross-pollinate learning and bring innovations. Institutionalization of joint planning process, introduction of the innovative learning platform like WASH conference, promotion of cross-sector learning and establishment of reward and recognition have enriched the sector from knowledge management and service delivery perspectives.

However, the socio-cultural dogma like *Chhaupadi* (a local word for a menstruating woman forced to stay in a small hut and not allowed to stay with family); misperception regarding baby's faeces; maintaining ODF situation across highways; poor operation and maintenance of facilities in schools, institutions and public places; inadequate facilities for disables; continuation of poor hygiene practices; feeble local capacity to promote disaster resilient and climate change-friendly structures; complexity of ODF in urban areas and gradual decline of the water sources are the key barriers. The sector has to develop and implement comprehensive specific plans to address these issues including disparities. Efforts need to be accelerated in achieving Total Sanitation in ODF declared districts. Total Sanitation is a much higher target than achieving ODF as it includes use of toilets, handwashing with soap at critical times, safe handling and treatment of water at household level, maintaining personal hygiene, and solid and liquid waste management.

Similarly, promotion of disaster resilient approaches and technologies, strengthening of locally managed operation and maintenance mechanisms, linkage of sanitation with income generation and livelihood aspects, introduction of urban-friendly approach and promotion of total sanitation are imperative to run and sustain the environment friendly sanitation movement in Nepal. If it happens, Nepal will comfortably achieve the national goal and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets within the given time frame and promote equity, inclusion and sustainability in the WASH sector.

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## Note/s

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the government/organizations they work for.

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## Contact details

*Mr Kamal Adhikari is a sociologist with the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage, Government of Nepal. He is widely engaged in policy formulation and national level capacity development process. Mr Hom Nath Acharya is a WASH Officer with UNICEF Nepal responsible for WASH in Institutions.*

Kamal Adhikari  
Department of Water Supply and Sewerage, Nepal  
Tel: (+977) 9851138502  
Email: [kamal.anthro@gmail.com](mailto:kamal.anthro@gmail.com)

Hom Nath Acharya  
UNICEF Nepal  
Tel: (+977) 9841741865  
Email: [hacharya@unicef.org](mailto:hacharya@unicef.org)