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Awareness building for community participation

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Awareness building for community participation

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Introduction

This paper attempts to record a few field experiences of building awareness among rural communities of new innovations and improvements in rural water supply and environmental sanitation and to share briefly, the approaches for implementation.

It has particular reference to experience of awareness building in connection with

- the UNICEF/UNDP/Govt. of India sponsored Feasibility Study in low cost rural sanitation in West Bengal.
- Promotion of sanitation through Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Programmes
- Training programmes for conducting sanitation campaigns in Madhya Pradesh.
- Programmes for awareness camps in West Bengal villages covered by the Technology Mission on Drinking Water Supply in West Bengal.
- Promotion of sanitation in predominantly Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe villages, aided by CAPART.

The above awareness building linked with hardware activities were undertaken, through the Women's Co-ordinating Council (WCC), a voluntary agency constituted of 105 women's voluntary organisations in West Bengal as a part of promoting integrated projects which improve the quality of life for women, children and the community.

Background

Many development projects have very limited success due to the failure to involve communities who are passive recipients, resistant and even critical of programmes and projects undertaken for them.

This is particularly evident in water, sanitation, housing, smokeless chulhas and other technology development programme which intimately affects the communities daily life and habits.

A well designed strategy to create awareness and bring about active community participation is a basic prerequisite for any development programme. This includes a communication support or information, education, motivation (IEC) to **provide the necessary knowledge base for community involvement** and participation in planning decision making, implementation, proper use and maintenance of the utilities provided.

A holistic approach to water and sanitation often involves retaining good habits and practi-

ces but changing those that are harmful in order to derive the maximum benefit, improve the health status and the quality of life in the entire village.

Hence **awareness building** programmes must be designed **for the entire village community** - men, women and children through various approaches.

Participation of women and men

It is essential that women should participate with men at household and community levels in making decisions between technology options, design, location, maintenance of water supply and sanitation facilities i.e. handpump, wells, tanks, sanitary latrines, smokeless chulhas, bathing enclosures, garbage pits etc. since they are the primary users of these facilities.

It is important to note that promotion of women's participation is not a separate effort, parallel to men's participation. Men and women need to have an integral vision of their responsibility in water and sanitation.

However, greater effort and focus must be given to awareness of women because generally development plans and programmes, are planned and implemented without the involvement of women.

Teams of **women trainers and communicators** who are experienced at working and motivating rural communities are necessary for involving women and men.

After conducting **surveys and collecting data on the habits and practices of different communities** WCC developed **visual aids for education** which are attractive to the village community and convey simple relevant messages that are easy to understand.

Clay models depict typical insanitary village situations, routes of diseases transmission, causes of water pollution, simple technology and self help for improving existing situations such as soak pits, garbage pits, drainage channels, platforms for handpumps, hore hole and sanitary latrines. Posters, slides, flip charts, flash cards, puppets, plays etc. are all used for awareness programmes as required.

A FEW APPROACHES AND EXPERIENCES IN AWARENESS BUILDING DURING WATER AND SANITATION PROGRAMMES -

- In 1985-86 Orientation/Training was conducted by WCC in West Bengal at State, District,

Block and Village level for all government and non-government functionaries connected with the GOI/UNICEF/UNDP Feasibility Study in Low Cost Rural Sanitation covering 350 villages in 5 districts in 9 blocks. Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), West Bengal was the implementing agency.

Orientation/Training at State, District, Block and Village level.

At District and Block level 643 men and 191 women participated in the two-day orientation training programmes. Participants were from the departments of Rural Developments, PHED, School Welfare, Education, Health Panchayet and Mass Media, Youth Club and Mahila Samity members, teachers, ICDS personnel, village doctors.

Training village level motivators is an important step in awareness building and creating a sustainable infrastructure for software and community participation.

Three motivators were trained from each village and an appropriate course content was developed for them. In village provided with latrines in fifty selected homes the recipients were informed motivated through household visits, group discussions and village camps.



Training motivators for awareness campaign

Despite several constraints, a spot check/survey done after one year showed that villages where awareness building was **well co-ordinated with construction activity** (i.e. began before and continued during and after) there was a high degree of community awareness and participation.

The beneficiaries were selected from the poorest families yet in villages visited by the team at regular intervals or where the motivators were active

- the superstructure have been constructed with locally available material according to affordability levels. Women have trained children and the aged to use latrines and are keeping them clean by following the information relayed during awareness camps and household visits.
- Several good health and hygiene practices have been adopted and a number of latrines have adjoining bathing enclosures. A few of families who were not given latrines made

bore holes and saved up to make dug well latrines within two years. Dung and gargabe pits were made and handpump platforms repaired.

Tremendous demand for latrines from families not covered under the programme turned to disappointment because there was no follow-up of the programme.

Latrines in institutions for awareness

Latrines in primary school, youth club, mahila samity, mosque, temple, markets and so on were built to reach and motivate large numbers, but without a well designed strategy for promotion they did not have the intended impact.

- **The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programmes** currently implemented in a large number of blocks in India is an important channel for awareness building.

The Anganwadi Centre at village level is a focal point for various mother and child development services. Latrine units have been constructed by WCC in 125 villages at Anganwadi Centres spread over 5 Blocks. **The children at the centre can be trained to use the latrines** and inculcate good hygiene habits. Mothers can become familiar with the technology and concept of household latrines, no-cost or low-cost sanitary improvements and adopt necessary change in hygiene practices.

Subsequent awareness programme through two-day camps were conducted for ICDS personnel, Block Level government functionaries of departments, Panchayets, teachers, health workers, and local NGOs. The parties became oriented on the concept of integrated water, health, hygiene and sanitation for raising the health status of children and the community, implementing such a programme how ICDS can link with other departments for promotional work and motivate the community through the ICDS channel.

It was observed that the participation and response from the community in these blocks was much greater than in the three others. Children at the centre were taught good hygiene habits and sanitation messages through action songs, poems and plays. Mothers were oriented during monthly meeting and home visits.



Children assist in making soak pit

There were requests for constructing household latrines from applicants willing to bear full costs there was no follow up of the programme.

Training Modules for Building Community Awareness

In collaboration with UNICEF, WCC and four leading training institutions have developed core training syllabi for five categories of personnel who can promote integrated water, health and sanitation programmes. The five categories of personnel found to be most relevant groups are trainers, primary school teachers, ICDS field staff village sanitation motivators and masons.

Motivators may be youth club and mahila mandal members, Panchayet members, village level workers and others willing to sustain programmes.

These modules are being used to strengthen IEC activities in support of integrated sanitation programmes.

The core syllabi highlights the key aspects of water and sanitation to be promoted. Relevant local situations, local culture and beliefs can be incorporated to complement the core content.

Visual aids have been extensively used as they have been found, from experience, to be very effective communication tools. The training of school teachers, ICDS staff and village motivators is usually conducted in the villages. Since electricity is not available in many villages the visuals are basically flip charts, models, flash cards and posters.



Household visit during training

The training modules have been used to conduct water, health, and sanitation awareness programmes covering all three ICDS blocks in Andaman Island in collaboration with the Government and UNICEF, 286 participants were Anganwadi workers, supervisors, health workers, Panchayet members and Block personnel.

ICDS modules have also been used in two districts of West Bengal and the community response has been quite encouraging.

One of the purpose of conducting awareness building programme is to orient/train existing channels and create informed and motivated

human resource base at community level which can continue promotional activities with water, health and sanitation, inform and involve the community at every stage and form the link between development planners and the community.

Monitoring the effect of awareness building in terms observable behavioural change and other indicators of community participation is an important component in the training syllabi of the modules.

Awareness Building Camps linked with rural water supply and the Drinking Water Mission, Department of Rural Development sponsored by CAPART.

In collaboration with the district nodal agency, the department of the rural development and PHED, meetings and discussions held at District and Block Level created an awareness of the different approaches for awareness building among the government functionaries, Panchayets and representatives of various interest groups. They were sensitised to the need for community participation for maximum benefit in terms of proper use, maintenance, raising the health and hygiene standard, the role of women, men and children and so on.

The camps held in 70 villages in 10 blocks is of two day's duration. A general survey of the village situation, the habits and practices related to water and sanitation may be done through household visits, group discussions and observations. This survey and data collection is essential for an awareness programme which is relevant to the actual situation, problems, constraints etc. existant in the villages which affects women, men, children and the aged in different ways.

Awareness camps should be held at a time convenient for women participants. The venue must also be a central place in the village which is easily accessible.

Farmers working in their fields often requested a second camp in the evening which are held in the light of lanterns.

At camps women and men community volunteers/motivators are identified to continue awareness building through specific activities which the participants themselves suggested during group discussions and sessions on action plans.

There is no provision for incentives for motivators therefore metal badges of the Water Mission are pinned on motivators to give them recognition and encouragement.

The programme includes field visits with groups which walk through the village, note observable improvements and also instances of poor hygiene, water wastage, stagnant water, insanitary conditions around handpumps and wells

etc. They hold discussions around observe and discuss source, storage and use of water and hygiene habits.



Community building handpump platform

Household visits create and and awareness at family level, awareness of the village situation and the community participation necessary to bring about necessary changes on habits and practices and good use and maintenance of water sources.

- **Training of Trainers, Engineers, Sanitation Motivators, school teachers and ICDS personnel** held in one block in Madhya Pradesh was linked with a sanitation campaign which included the construction of household latrines. Measons training programme by an NGO developed local hardware in frastructure. The programme was organised by the modal government department with UNICEF support.

Motivators were youth club and mahila mandal members, Panchayet members, adult education teachers and other interested villagers with leadership potential. They are assigned specific observable activities which will be monitored monthly and involve the participation of each household, Panchayets, institutions such as schools, anganwadi centres along with government officials in charge of the hardware.

The human resource already exists in villages. Board based strategies for informing orienting, training and empowering the existant village infrastructure is necessary to enable the community to participate at all stages of development programmes. There was treimendous response from the community observed towards the end of the programme.

A few observations on awareness building

- Awareness building programmes within a community may begin at any time around general issues that concern their daily life. A variety of approaches may be used by catalysts who may be intermediaries who come from outside to assist in building a village level infrastructure for decision making and action linked with specific development programmes.

It should be undertake within a flexible time time frame which allows the community time

to understand, accept, or even reject, make modifications, decide on their role and agree on the extent of their participation. However, the delivery mechanism must be prepared for an immediate response.

- Experienced women informants, facilitators or intermediaries should be involved from the planning stage to ensue women's participation in decision making and management at community level. They should be committed persons because awareness building is an arduous process but once achieved, even partially, it can be extremely rewarding for the development planners, implementors and the community.
- Correct information be conveyed through several channels adopting diverse local approaches but through organised integrated strategies which are broadly replicable.



Women communicators for community participation