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## Paradigm shift in sanitation promotion

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## Paradigm shift in sanitation promotion

*Sk Abu Jafar Shamsuddin, Bangladesh*

ALTHOUGH CONCERTED EFFORTS of government, NGOs and private sector are being put, to promote sanitation coverage, in Bangladesh, in order to keep pace with the significant achievement in the provision of safe water, the rate of progress made is not encouraging. The required momentum in the rate of sanitation coverage and the sustainability are still prevailing as prime issues in the sanitation sector in the country. A recent venture to a study area in overcoming these issues is yielding encouraging results. The approach is significantly different from other concurrent projects operational in the country. The project with the new approach involves only the local potentials with backstopping support of appropriate communication channels available within the community. External involvement was very much insignificant and indirect. The community response in the project area towards promotion of sanitation indicates a new direction to address sanitation issues in upcoming projects in the country. The paper aims at highlighting the salient features of the emerging model in contrast to the conventional ones.

### Study area

The study initiated in Ghania, a remote village in Gupti-East Union under Faridganj thana<sup>1</sup> of Chandpur district. The village is at the farthest end of the thana and is about 18 km. away from its thana proper and is connected mostly by katcha<sup>2</sup> road. The services of public sector agencies are rather poor and inadequate. Similar is the case with water supply and sanitation services.

### The project

The characteristic feature of the project lies in its dynamic nature of conceptualization, formulation, planning, implementation and evaluation, all proceeding parallel. There are scopes for drawing lessons from the very inception of the project.

### Sparkling initiative

A jobless youth of the locality was the prime mover. After passing his H.S.C examination he was contemplating to work for improvement of the prevailing unhealthy environment of the village. He used to talk to his fellow friends of the same locality about the appalling situation of the village. Two unemployed boys responded sharply. An informal group with three of them was then formed, who decided to work together towards the socio-economic development of their village. In the process of their thoughts, they first decided to know more about the present situation

of the village prior taking any step or course of action. Soon they realized that it would not be possible for three of them to bring any change or do anything without substantial participation of the community. Also that, more active working hands would be needed to facilitate all the development efforts. In the process of this quick assessment, they also identified enthusiastic youths willing to join them. They then expanded their core group to six.

### Preliminary assessment

They then decided to visit every bari<sup>3</sup> and every household to collect more information of the existing situation of the village. Their immediate objective was to identify issues and potential resource base of the locality. Although not well designed, they used a questionnaire developed by them for collection of information.

### Problems

More than 90 per cent of the respondent mentioned 'poverty' as their number one problem, followed by housing (63 per cent), unemployment (60 per cent), food & clothing (55 per cent), fuel (37 per cent) and health (32 per cent). In about 22 per cent cases, water supply was mentioned while sanitation it was mentioned only in 12 per cent cases.

### Resources

The community could hardly identify the potential resources that they are possessing in the locality. Virtually, there was no mention of resources other than agricultural land which is very limited and quite a good number of ponds (65).

### External assistance

At this stage, when they were perplexed with the issues around them, they managed to get advice and guidance through personal contact from an external person. They also got training from a non government organization (NGO) on water and sanitation in two batches. Three of them with S.S.C certificate availed training on 'communication and motivation skill development for the promotion of water supply and sanitation' while the other three with H.S.C certificate undertook a 'training of trainers (TOT) course' on water supply and sanitation.

### Structured rapid assessment

With the enhanced skill, they designed a survey proforma after they had detailed discussions in several sessions among themselves. A pre-test of their questionnaire was

carried out and the proforma was finalized for field application. In the process of testing and learning, all the six spent first two days together and visited their own baries and some other adjoining baries. From the following day, six of them were splitted into three groups with two in each group. The entire survey area was divided into three zones and each group was assigned with one zone. They were well received by the people as they were well known in the locality.

#### Demographic and socio-economic situation

Total No. of population : 2868  
Total No. of households : 553  
Total No. of baries : 25

#### Income distribution

Figure 1 shows the average monthly household income. About 55 per cent of the households have average monthly income of less than Tk<sup>4</sup> 3000/-.

#### Education

Table 1 shows No. of youths, both male and female, with education level of S.S.C and above. Of a total of 150, it was observed that 68 per cent were unemployed.

Figure 1. Monthly house-hold income distribution

Table 1

Figure 2. Existing sanitation coverage before campaign

#### Housing

Table 2 shows the housing pattern in the locality.

Table 2

Figure 3. Willingness to have sanitary latrines after preliminary campaign

#### Water supply situation

Table 3

There are a good number of hand tubewells, primarily privately owned. Although over 90 per cent of the population use tubewell water for drinking purpose, its use for other domestic purposes are not satisfactory.

### Sanitation situation

Table 5

The excreta disposal situation is very unsatisfactory. Including home-made latrines, the coverage is only 11 per cent. These home-made latrines are often not structurally stable. Obnoxious smell and pit collapsing are common. Consideration of home-made latrine as sanitary latrine is still being debated.

### Sanitation campaign

The core team assessed the prevailing sanitation situation as the number one environmental issue of their locality. Although initial community response didn't show sanitation as a major problem, they were confident that proper messages on sanitation will make them convinced on the importance of sanitation. With their enhanced communication and motivation skill, they launched a planned sanitation campaign where messages on the need for safe water and sanitation and also the adverse effect of the polluted environment because of insanitary condition were communicated to the community. As a strategy, inter-personal communication, 'uthan baithak'<sup>7</sup>, and meetings with local leaders, school teachers were followed. Some posters and leaf-lets on sanitation were used and distributed during these interactions.

### Local capacity building

During 'rapid assessment' and subsequent 'sanitation campaign' the core team felt a need for more active working hands. A one-week course on 'communication and motivation skill development on water and sanitation', was organized by them. Six enthusiastic youths identified during the course of 'rapid assessment' and 'sanitation campaign' undertook the course offered by the team. Thus the trained work force was expanded to 12 members from the locality. Social mobilization activities were continued primarily through inter-personal communication.

### Rapid feed-back

To get community response afresh after the 'sanitation campaign', a 'participatory rapid assessment' was carried

out. Poverty was still seen as number one issue (>90 per cent of the respondent), while sanitation came up as number two issue (61 per cent of the respondent), followed by other issues. The community also identified communication business, fisheries, livestock, poultry, sanitation production centres, and tubewell mechanic as potential areas and professions for income generation.

### Willingness to improve sanitation situation

Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the existing sanitation coverage and willingness to acquire sanitary latrines after the sanitation campaign. Although it is a mere willingness, it does reflect the impact of their sanitation campaign.

### Lessons learnt by the core team

The core team has drawn the following lessons from the project:

- Poverty is the primary issue of the community;
- Sanitation is a major issue;
- Almost every household has enough potential working hands;
- Linking sanitation programme with income generation activities is necessary for sustainable development of sanitation;
- Social mobilization and motivational drive bring in significant positive changes; and
- Natural resource base to support income generation activities is there in the locality.

## Emerging paradigm

### Conventional approach

#### Public sanitation centres

Salient features:

- Permanent sanitation centres primarily thana based;
- Mason and labourers are engaged out of public fund on temporary terms and conditions;
- Thana based Sub Assistant Engineer (SAE) is responsible for supervision of the centre; and
- Cost of sub-structure is sold to the user household at a subsidised rate.

Usual complaints of public centres:

- Soon after installation of the centres (about 2/3 years) gradual piling of sanitation components are a common scene. Saturation occurs in the natural command area of the sanitation centres. People outside the natural command area remains out of sanitation facilities.
- Procedural aspect of buying from a public centre takes more time.
- Choice in regard to type, quality, costs etc. are limited.

#### NGO Centres

Salient features:

- Complaints are more or less similar to the one of the public centres.

- Prices of sanitary latrine units vary from one of highly subsidised to the one of at cost price.
- Quality of the products varies.

### **Evolving approach**

The following are the important aspects of the new approach, which is in the process of emergence:

- Sanitation promoters and extension workers from the locality.
- Project planning at local level.
- Bottom-up planning.
- Extensive social mobilisation activities for sanitation promotion.
- Appropriate communication tools and methods.
- Linking sanitation with income generation activities.
- Mobile sanitation centres.
- More options.
- Support to private producers.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

- The new approach has the potential to bring in sustainable development in sanitation.
- The new approach of sanitation promotion is to be piloted in a number of places to crystallize the concept

and facilitate the formulation of implementation guidelines for wider application.

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<sup>1</sup> Thana is the administrative centre of a sub-district.

<sup>2</sup> Katcha is non-metalled

<sup>3</sup> Bari is cluster of rural households

<sup>4</sup> Tk is for local currency Taka. 1 US\$ = 45 Tk.

<sup>5</sup> Pucca is for a structure made of brick, mortar, concrete etc.

<sup>6</sup> Home-made latrine is a simple pit latrine covered with wooden planks or bamboo.

<sup>7</sup> 'Uthan Baithak' is for courtyard meeting.

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