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## Making community approach work

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## WATER, ENVIRONMENT AND MANAGEMENT

### Making community approach work

Mohammed Zia-Us-Sabur and Rashida Kanchwala



NGO Forum for Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation (DWSS) is a nationwide networking organisation of 350 local NGOs engaged in safe water and environmental sanitation activities in Bangladesh. Its prime objective is to promote the complementary role of NGO sector for water and sanitation. To this end, the forum plans and formulates projects on WSS, seeks funds for it from foreign government and non-government donors, and then implements, monitors, and finally evaluates these WATSAN programmes through its member NGOs operating at the grassroots (see figure-1). The Forum provides a wide range of support services to the partner NGOs when implementing the projects.

This paper will attempt to describe the programmatic interventions in the context of community approach undertaken by the Forum by taking its Village Sanitation (VS) programme as a case in point. The systematic phase by phase activities involved in the VS programme are as follows :

#### I. NEED ASSESSMENT :

Before designing a project, region-specific need assessments are carried out. This is done in the form of a rapid base-line survey by taking into consideration the following key factors:

1. Demographic factors of the region
2. Prevalent Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) of the community people regarding WATSAN

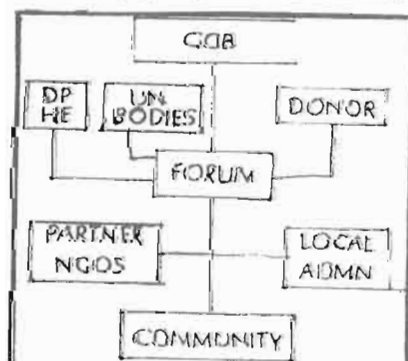


FIGURE - 1: COLLABORATION NETWORK

3. Existing hygiene behaviour pattern
4. Existing sanitation coverage
5. No. of local NGOs operating in the area and their institutional strength.

#### II. PROJECT DESIGN :

##### A. Consultations with the Partner NGOs:

After needs have been assessed, the intervention areas are identified on the basis of the following key indicators:

1. Sanitation coverage is below 6%
2. Less than 70% people have access to safe water
3. Less than 60% people do not practice adequate hygiene which includes using safe water for all purposes; handwashing before and after eating, and after defecation; fixed place defecation; and keeping the environment clean.

Once the intervention area has been selected, the local NGOs are contacted and a planning meeting is arranged. The objective is to sit together to determine feasible options for improving the existing situation. These meetings are conducted strictly on participatory approach. The local NGOs are encouraged to contribute their ideas and opinions and to inform the group about the problems faced by them during the implementation phase. Finally the group comes up with recommendations. Based on this a plan of action, containing the targets to be achieved within the agreed timeframe, is determined.

##### B. Consultation with the Donor :

The Forum has an Executive Committee whose members have a wide range of contacts with the international donor organisations. A project proposal,

based on the outcome of the consultation meeting with the local NGOs, is developed. This is then submitted to the donors who usually sanction the project after undertaking external appraisal of the Forum's organisational strength, the proposed area of interventions and a short feasibility study of the project components.

### III. PRE-IMPLEMENTATION PHASE :

This phase implies making necessary preparations to provide the community people with the motivational inputs by involving the partner NGOs. The steps taken to achieve this are :

- A. Institution building, and
- B. Motivational inputs to the community people.

#### A. Institution Building :

Since the Forum will implement its programme through the partner NGOs, its primary task is to identify the areas or skills in which the concerned NGOs are lacking. Based on this, appropriate training programmes are designed.

In the case of setting up a Village Sanitation Centre (VSC), the Forum has found that the local NGOs usually lack the skills for producing latrine sets and managing the VSCs. In addition, the NGO workers also require the motivational skills to affect behavioural change in the community people regarding sanitation and hygiene practices. To develop and improve these skills of the local NGO workers, the Forum provides the following two types of training :

- (i) VSC management training to mid-level workers
- (ii) Motivational skills training for field extension workers.

The Forum uses participatory approach in these training.

#### B. Motivational inputs :

The NGO field extension workers, in turn, carry out a motivational programme. Under this programme, the field workers build awareness regarding the salient features of safe water, sanitation and hygiene practices among the community people

and motivate them to adopt these practices by using both door-to-door and group approach. Here, women are the primary target group since use of water in Bangladesh is women-centered and they are the ones most concerned with the health of the family.

The Forum's partner NGOs carry out a range of development activities in their intervention area by forming groups which generally consist of 20-30 members. The groups are used as an entry point for sensitizing the people regarding water, sanitation and hygiene practices. The partner NGOs also employ the door-to-door approach. In addition, opinion leaders like the "imams" (religious leaders), local political leaders and school teachers are also motivated to carry out the awareness building activity. Furthermore, social influencers such as the school children are also motivated and mobilised for the purpose. Thus, by community approach NGO Forum refers to an effective intermix of various feasible, cost-effective, promotional strategies for ensuring the community participation.

After affecting perceptual and behavioural change of the community people the need is transformed into demand. This change requires creating provision for safe water through tubewells and fixed place defecation through hygienic latrines.

### IV. IMPLEMENTATION PHASE :

To supply hygienic latrines at community level the Forum establishes Village Sanitation Centres (VSCs) through its partner NGOs.

The VSC is a centre to which materials are supplied by the Forum and appropriate skills are taught to enable the production of 1 slab 5 rings single pit pour flush water-sealed latrine (UNICEF-DPHE model).

Material and financial support for the VSC provided by the Forum are as follows :

- \* Steel mould for pans, slab, and rings (worth Tk-5,000 equivalent to US\$ 125).
- \* Tk-45,000 (US\$ 1,125) is given as revolving fund for purchase of raw material (cement, sand, and others).

This US\$ 1,125 approximately equals production cost of 100 latrine sets.

The steps in the operational process of establishing a VSC is as follows :

1. Before applying to the Forum for VSCs, the partner NGOs present a short survey report on the actual demand for latrine sets within their activity areas.

2. Applications are made by the partner NGOs in the form prescribed by the Forum. These applications are submitted to the Forum's regional offices. Then the Forum's Principal Office gives its final approval on the basis of the following preconditions :

- (i) the centre shall be located at the village level,
- (ii) there shall not be any govt. VSC nearby,
- (iii) the NGO shall be capable of running a VSC with capacity to produce 100 latrine sets. For this, the NGO must :
  - (a) be able to bear the overhead expenditure,
  - (b) have facility for making of shed for the construction centre, store arrangement for storing cement and other materials,
  - (c) have water arrangement, preferably tubewell, for the centre.

The VSC operational flowchart explains the detailed application sanction procedure. The VSCs are then set-up and these are managed and operated by the partner NGOs. The

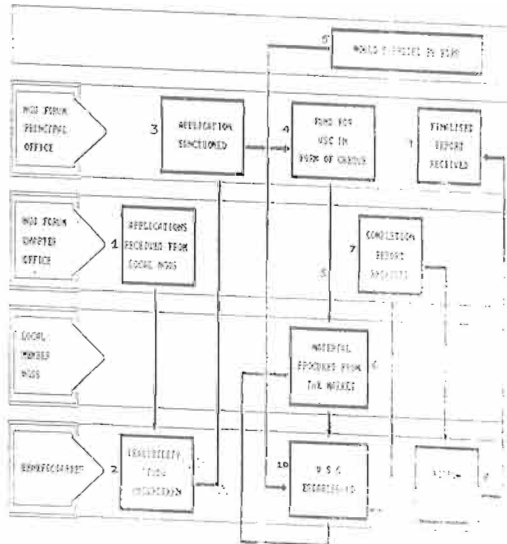


FIGURE - 2 : OPERATIONAL FLOW-CHART OF VILLAGE SANITATION CENTRES

latrines are produced and sold on a non-profit basis. Sale proceeds are then used as a revolving fund to produce more latrines.

3. It is to be noted here, that if there exists insufficient coverage (below 70%) of safe water in the area where the partner NGO plans to set up a VSC, the NGO also applies for tubewell support, together with the VSC support, to the Forum. The Forum, after reviewing the demand survey report submitted by the partner NGO and after inspection of the sites selected for tubewell installation, supplies the tubewell (no-6 handpump) and materials for platform construction to the NGO. These are then distributed to the beneficiaries only bear the cost of transportation, sinking of tubewell and making of the platform. The masons employed by NGOs assist the beneficiaries in installing tubewells and constructing platforms. The work of these masons involve making sanitary components i.e. pan, slab, and rings, for latrines at the VSCs.

4. The Forum gives training to the caretakers of tubewells and masons of VSCs, in order to help the partner NGOs to operate the tubewell and latrine installations efficiently. With a view to promoting the role of women in water and environmental sanitation services (PROWESS), the Forum encourages the women to participate in these training. In the case of caretakers' training, one caretaker usually woman is trained for each tubewell and a tool box consisting of two slide wrenches and one screw driver is given to them for proper maintenance and repair of tubewell.

5. A legal agreement is entered into by the Forum and the partner NGOs before the possession and title of the VSC is transferred to the partner NGOs. Under this agreement, the partner NGO is required to submit a quarterly status report to the Forum. For this purpose, the partner NGO has to maintain a cash book and monitor other relevant accounting procedures. The Forum accounts personnel provide the necessary training in this regard. A discreet detailed out format is given to the concerned NGO to ensure uniformity of the financial reporting system.

6. On completion of the VSC and installation of tubewell if undertaken, the partner NGO submits a completion report to the respective regional office. The regional office then conducts follow-up of all of these VSCs and tubewells. During their VSC inspection visit, the regional officers inspect the stock register of the VSCs to examine the nos. of latrines produced and the nos. sold in a particular period. They also ensure that separate accounts are maintained against the sale of latrine components. The quality of latrine sets is also examined. In the case of tubewell follow-up, the regional officers inspect the tubewell site to ensure that it has been installed at the place approved by the Forum. They also check the level of water discharge to determine whether the tubewell is operating efficiently. In addition, the water table and water layer are also checked.

7. Once the VSC starts operating, the beneficiaries purchase the latrine sets which costs about Tk.450 - 500 (approx. US\$ 11-12) from the VSCs. Considering the income level of the rural people, few individual can afford to buy this latrine set. Therefore, people are encouraged to buy in groups so that they can avail of the installment payment facility which allows a group to pay the amount in 10 installments. In addition to the cost of latrine set, the beneficiaries bear the cost of transportation and construction of super structure. They will also bear the subsequent costs of repair and maintenance.

## V. SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROGRAMME :

To make the programme sustainable, the Forum uses the community participation as the most important means to reach the end.

1. To make the motivational programme self-sustaining, the Forum ensures constant mutual interactions between the community people, the opinion leaders, the school children and the NGO workers, even after the programme is discontinued.

2. To ensure sustainability of its hardware support, the Forum makes the target beneficiaries and local NGOs adequately skilled to produce, repair and maintain the latrines and tubewells provided, and also makes people collectively share its financial burden.

3. The partner NGOs play a significant role in ensuring sustainability. Since they speak the language of the grassroot people and are also a part of the community, they can keep a constant tab on their local community people. Moreover, as the Forum strengthens their capacity and skills, they can continue to carry out the promotional, motivational, and training activities once the project has discontinued.

## VI. CONCLUSION :

The situation prevailing in the society and politics of Bangladesh coupled with the resultant illiteracy, poverty and increasing population, has made the task of reaching out to the people at the grassroot with the complete package of integrated approach on water, sanitation and hygiene education a difficult one. However, the decade experience has clearly revealed that community approach is the most feasible, efficient and cost-effective option to sustain the WATSAN programmes by empowering the rural poor by ensuring participation. Two fundamental factors still remain to be the major restraining factors in this regard. These are lack of (i) material resources, and (ii) skilled human resources. These are the end result of the narrowed down short term perspective of the External Support Agencies. The fact is often asserted but never put into practice that water and sanitation programmes is to be seen not on project basis rather it should be seen programmatically based on long term commitment.