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A new communication strategy

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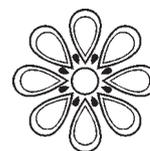
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A new communication strategy

Jagmeet Uppal, India

INDIA IS A vast country, with an enormous heterogeneity of cultures, traditions, languages, beliefs and customs. Geographically it is huge, covering the sub-continent from the mighty Himalayas in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south, from the Bay of Bengal in the east to the Arabian Sea in the west.

The terrain is as varied as the people, and even today, in spite of phenomenal advances in communication, some areas of the country are inaccessible during some seasons. India also suffers from a number of demographic handicaps such as a huge population, poverty, a low literacy level, and an obscurantist caste system.

Since Independence, the Government of India has laid enormous stress upon the supply of safe drinking water to the entire rural population through the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme. Out of 1.318 million rural habitations in the country, 1.243 million habitations (as on 1st April 1996) have already been provided access to a safe drinking water source through the efforts of the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission (Union Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment) and the State Governments. So far, over Rs. 15,000 crores (US \$ 43,000 million) have been spent in the Rural Water Supply sector by the Government.

Developing a strategy

There has been a marked emphasis on technological upgradation, and yet the massive efforts of the Government have not had an appreciable impact on the health of the general population. The chief reason for this unsatisfactory state lies in lack of awareness among the communities about the importance of proper storage, handling and consumption of safe drinking water.

Besides, in all these years, the issue of sanitation was not addressed simultaneously with the provision of water supply. As a result, the issues of water supply and sanitation could not get due priority with either the implementors or the users.

In 1994, the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission set up for the first time an Expert Committee to evaluate the Rural Water Supply Programme in the country. The Committee, which submitted its report in mid-1994, suggested that the software aspects of water supply should henceforth be an integral part of the programme.

It was suggested that the Mission should formulate an Information, Education & Communication (IEC) strategy to ensure active community participation in the programme, to tackle the problems of Operation & Maintenance,

quality, sustainability, sanitary aspects of water supply, and sanitation. The Committee recommended that IEC should be made compulsory for all State Governments.

In accordance with the recommendations of the Expert Committee, the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission appointed a full time IEC Consultant with the objective of formulating a national IEC strategy. Accordingly, the Consultant studied the successes and failures of the Rural Water Supply programmes, visited pilot projects funded by bilateral and multilateral agencies, interacted with NGOs, implementors, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and formulated a National IEC strategy, which was approved and endorsed by all the States.

Initial problems

From the beginning, the thrust of the Rural Water Supply Programme was to achieve physical targets and cover more and more habitations. As a result, instead of being a social programme, it was more of an engineering-oriented programme. In this scenario, when the concept of IEC was first mooted to the States, there were many hiccups and barriers as neither the implementing agency nor the finance department of State governments was mentally prepared to spend any amount on creating awareness among the communities.

As a result, although every State approved and accepted the IEC strategy, many developed cold feet when it came to implementation. Under the national funding guidelines and in order to ensure full participation of the States, it was decided to have a 50:50 share between the Centre and the State for the IEC programme. The first barrier raised was that the States lacked funds.

As Health/Hygiene Education formed an integral part of the IEC programme, many States felt this was the work of the Health Department and not of the Water Supply & Sanitation Department. However, through personal advocacy and intervention, State authorities were convinced that disseminating information on water and sanitation is not a priority with the health worker, as he/she is more concerned with target oriented programmes such as family planning, immunisation etc.

It was also brought to the notice of the State water supply and sanitation departments that the issues of O&M, sustainability, quality etc., cannot be tackled without an effective IEC programme.

Strategy

The basic premise of the communication strategy is to bring a permanent change in people's behaviour and to

institutionalise the concept of sanitation, sanitary aspects of water supply, ownership, Operation & Maintenance within the community, to be passed on from generation to generation like other social practices.

The communication strategy has well defined short-term and long-term objectives, including empowering women, reducing infant mortality and morbidity, generating felt need among households for the construction of sanitary latrines, creating a sense of community participation, and consciousness about the quality of water, etc.

The strategy envisages the involvement of all sections of society, from bottom-up to top-down, for launching a people's movement for WATSAN and bringing about a permanent behavioural change at community level. For the first time, the concept of social marketing has been adopted to promote the concept of sanitation. The concept of health education is planned to be introduced in the community through schools and *anganwadis*.

Women and youth will be in the forefront during the implementation of the IEC strategy throughout the country. Promotion of household latrines has been planned as a prestige product with emphasis on the themes of "Prestige", "Status," "Privacy" and "Convenience" (targeted principally at women).

65 districts in 25 States, covering about 14 per cent of the country's population, have been selected for the 1st Phase of implementation of the IEC strategy. Projects for over Rs20.00 crores (US \$5.7 million) have been sanctioned for implementing the IEC programme during 1996-97. Another Rs4 crores (US \$1.1 million) are being spent on a Baseline Survey, social advocacy material, media material and material for sensitisation/reorientation/training of various level IEC functionaries and opinion leaders.

For the first time, it has been decided to sensitise the district Panchayat Presidents, Members of the Legislative Assemblies and Members of Parliament (from IEC districts) to strengthen political will to implement the strategy. A schedule, with a variable syllabus, has been prepared for the whole country to sensitise/reorient the various functionaries, groups, implementors, administrators, political leaders, media professionals, literacy figures, religious leaders and opinion leaders.

The strategy will be implemented with the launching of an "Intensive Awareness Campaign" in all 65 districts, by organising *padyatras* (foot marches) at the village, block and district levels, to make the campaign both memorable and visible. To secure wholehearted community participation, the strategy proposes that at each level the people coin their own slogans— which they can identify with— and write them on village walls with the help of youth clubs and women's groups.

Baseline survey

For the first time, it was decided to conduct a detailed Baseline Survey in the IEC districts on Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP); behavioral patterns; community view on implementors and vice-versa; actual status

of Water Supply & Sanitation; specific issues like O&M sustainability; role of local institutions; role of NGOs', media accessibility and acceptability etc.

Ten instruments were developed for the Baseline Survey. These include: Village Information Schedule; Household Enumeration; Household Information Schedule; Institutional Schedule (school, *anganwadi* and panchayat); O&M of Water Supply Systems; O&M of Sanitation Schedule of NGOs; Implementors Viewpoint; Case Studies Guidelines and Focus Group Interviews Guidelines.

20 villages in each district and 30 households in each village are being selected as samples for the survey. The survey results will indicate the interventions required at various levels during the Intensive Awareness Campaign. The survey results will be analysed for each district and the State, to help finalise appropriate location-specific messages for the districts, in addition to general messages planned in advance. The survey results will also help the State and the Union Governments to make necessary interventions in the hardware aspects of the WATSAN programme.

Media approach

Inter-personal communication and traditional media are the main communication wheels at village level for disseminating information relating to the needs of the community, and to ensure active community participation. The thrust of the strategy is to develop a sense of involvement by promoting a sense of competitiveness between houses.

At district level, local newspapers will be used to build an environment in favour of the water and sanitation programme and to create a spirit of competitiveness among schools, localities, habitations, villages and blocks.

At the State level, electronic media will be used in regional languages, to strengthen the people's movement at district level. The vernacular press will be used to create an environment in the IEC districts, as well as in the States, in favour of the awareness campaign.

At the national level, electronic media will be used to build an atmosphere in favour of the campaign. Besides this, the print media will be tapped to play a social advocacy role.

Infrastructure

For effective implementation of the strategy, it was decided to have separate infrastructural support from national to the village level, and inter-sectoral coordination i.e. coordination with the Departments of Education, Health, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, etc.

At the national level, a national IEC Cell headed by a Consultant (IEC) has been set-up, while at State level IEC Cells are being set-up, headed by a Consultant and supported by two Public Health Engineers (one for water, one for sanitation). The concept of a State Coordinating Agency (SCA) has been devised to provide software support to the IEC Cell and for effective implementation of the programme.

At district level, a District Coordinating Agency (DCA) which could be an NGO/Teachers Training Institute/Educational Institute or similar agency, is being engaged to carry out the Intensive Awareness Campaign under the overall supervision of the District Collector. At Block level, two Block level Coordinators (BLCs) are being engaged to oversee the campaign in all the villages of the Block in each village. A motivator (preferably a woman) is being engaged for a short period of four months, with token compensation, to disseminate information and to conduct the regular Village Contact Drive (VCD).

School sanitation constitutes an integral part of the Intensive Awareness Campaign. In each district, a "School Sanitation Cell" is being constituted and similar Cells are coming up at the Block level with the objective of selecting at least one teacher for each primary school of the IEC district, to be in-charge of school sanitation. The IEC strategy gives prominence to the concept of "Sanitation through School" over the concept of "Sanitation in School".

WATSAN Committees, giving wider representation to all sections of the community are being constituted at State, District, Block and Village level, with the objective of overseeing and monitoring the campaign. Such Com-

mittees will advise the implementing agencies overseeing and monitor the campaign and also advise the implementing agencies about the issues related to awareness campaign. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (elected local bodies) are being fully involved at Village, Block and district level for the awareness campaign.

Conclusion

Despite the initial hitches, the IEC programme in India is well set to take off in a big way in the last quarter of 1996. It will be a people's movement and may well be one of the largest programmes ever run by the country. If the first phase of the IEC programme achieves success, it is likely that all the 500-odd districts of the country may be covered under the IEC programme over the next five years with an approximate expenditure of over Rs. 200 crores (US\$ 60 million).

References

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