



Rural sanitation movement in China: case study - Anhui province

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Anhui province is located the middle and low reach of the Yangzi river in southeast of the People's Republic of China, covers an area of 139,600 square kilometers. The population is about 61 million inhabitants, of which 82% are living in rural areas. The climate of the province is subtropical, mild and humid. Yellow Mountain seats to the south provincial border.

Due to the economics and cultural reasons, before 1995 the latrines used in rural area of Anhui Province mainly were primitive open pits. The coverage of the sanitary latrines was only 9.7% of rural population.

Anhui is an agricultural province. 99% of farmers have the practices of using fresh human and livestock excreta as fertilizer for agriculture. These nightsoil without non-hazardous means of disposal have polluted farmland and water sources and have become one of the main transmission routes of intestinal infections. In 1995 the morbidity of the intestinal infectious diseases possessed 70% of that of all kinds infections in rural areas of Anhui province. Some counties are Schistosomiasis endemic areas.

In order to cut the pathways of transmitting such infections for better community health and social-economic productivity, the provincial government has launched a large scale "rural sanitation movement" in the whole province based on successful experience gained from China/UNICEF cooperation projects on environmental sanitation and hygiene education since 1996.

Pertinent strategies

Putting "rural sanitation" in development agenda of every level of governments

Since the beginning of 1996 the provincial government has set rural environment sanitation as one of the top priorities on the development agenda. The rural sanitation movement under the slogan "*drinking safe water, using sanitary latrines, and living in clean environment*" was then initiated. The governments at all levels have put rural sanitation into their annual plan objectives. The goals and targets of sanitary latrines are divided to cities, counties, townships and villages. Sanitation performance on achieving the set goals is made as a criterion of job performance evaluations for the governments at all levels.

The priority of rural sanitation has been boosted up once again when the provincial government designated sanitation as an important part of the campaign on spiritual civilization in rural area. Rural sanitation is then included as one of the core criteria for the entitlement of civilization families, villages and townships.

To ensure fulfillment of rural sanitation movement and strengthening the coordination among related sectors, the provincial government has established water supply and environment sanitation leading committee, advised and led by the provincial vice party-secretary, provincial vice-governor and provincial propaganda bureau director. The members of the committee include directors from 18 related provincial departments/agencies e.g. planning commission, finance, construction, health, land management, agriculture, youth league, broadcasting, etc. While the committee plays critical role in coordinating all relevant sectors, the office of the leading committee is formed to plan, give technical support and advice, manage and monitor the movement. The same structure of leading committee and office is also established at city and county levels.

Developing policy/regulations preferential to sanitation promotion

It is difficult to accelerate the sanitation coverage without policy support. Under the coordination of provincial leading committee on water supply and environment sanitation, many relevant departments of the provincial government have developed policy/regulations preferential to sanitation promotion. For example, the Department of Construction has included sanitation as an important component of the township and village planning. The Department of Land Management has stipulated new house regulations that approval for land to construct new houses, the design must include construction of a sanitary latrine. The Department of Finance has allocated specific budget for sanitation promotion. The Department of Civil Affair has included sanitation into the plan for migrating towns and villages. The Department of Health has set up the awarding system for outstanding people on sanitation performance. The government has included sanitation as a core indicator for the entitlement of "better-off" and "civilization" towns and villages. The above policies/regulations have contributed to the progress of rural sanitation movement in Anhui province.

Strengthening inter-sectoral collaboration and youth participation

Rural sanitation is a revolution work that combats the age-old practices and involves millions of households. Therefore, the sanitation effort must not be considered a purely sectoral initiative isolated from overall social and economic policy. The effective strategy will demand extensive cooperation and coordination among all related sectors. As

mentioned above, 18 departments/agencies are involved in the rural sanitation committee with clearly defined responsibilities of each department. Periodic meetings of the committee are held for coordination and follow-up the progress of rural sanitation movement. Relevant departments like health, youth league, construction, land management, agriculture, etc. have jointly issued an official document on "Accelerating the Promotion of Rural Sanitation in Rural Areas". This document has stipulated the inter-sectoral policies and strategies, which are essential to the promotion of rural sanitation in Anhui province.

Anhui is the pioneer province in China in mobilizing youth leadership and participation in tackling this age-old problem on sanitation as part of the spiritual civilization campaign, since young people are easy to accept new ideas and make changes. A joint official document by Provincial Health Department and Youth League (Party's mass organization with 18-29 years old young members) on "Mobilizing the participation of Party's Youth League members in promoting environment sanitation" was issued and followed by a joint organized conference on the same title in May 1998. The conference was chaired by the vice party-secretary of Anhui province to call for the intensifying efforts of youth league cadres and members in promoting sanitation.

In Anhui, there are about 100,000 cadres of Youth League in villages. Currently, youth cadres are taking the lead to build sanitary latrines at home. As such, it established many good models spreading across the neighbourhood and community as "live education tool", so that people can see in reality what a sanitary is and its advantages. Moreover, each youth cadre is encouraged to motivate another 5-10 households to build new latrines. As a result, more than a million of sanitary latrines have been built since 1998. The youth participation has indeed become significant and continued forces to push rural sanitation in Anhui province.

Continued communication and mobilizing people

Not only people but also the local government leaders know very little about sanitation due to cultural beliefs and practices. Therefore, in promoting this work, we need to appeal to people, and to policy makers, with information about many benefits, not only the health benefits. But there are also socio-economic benefits, through increased productivity, fewer sick days and reduced costs of health care. Use of safe fertilizer from sanitary latrines is an important contributor to agriculture and sustainable development.

Since 1997 high-level provincial advocacy conferences have been held every year with participation of local government leaders and directors of related provincial departments. After the provincial conferences, the governments of cities and counties also hold the similar conferences in their own areas, which generated a continued political momentum from level to level.

Media plays important and continuing roles in changing consciousness of people on sanitation. Journalists have been invited to attend those advocacy conferences, so that they could spread out the messages to the public. Communication strategy on sanitation promotion under the slogan of "*drinking safe water, using sanitary latrines, and living in clean houses*" is linked to both "civilization establishment campaign" and health education for 900 million peasants campaign". Communication/media channels such as TV, radio, newspaper, blackboards, video, wall posters, leaflets, slogans, etc.

Health Department and Youth League have jointly conducted "Communication Campaign Month" in November every year. During this period, intensive mass media and door-to-door communication by young people have been carried out to motivate and educate families for better sanitation, hygiene and clean environment. This campaign created the atmosphere of sanitation promotion in the whole province.

As a result of intensive social mobilization and communication, the communities are fully motivated and it created "self realization" among the people for the need of sanitation and clean living environment. People's attitude on sanitation and hygiene have changed from "you have to change" to "I want to change". People are to have modern and clean latrines, without smell or flies, and producing a top-quality fertilizer that is free of disease-carrying germs. The kind of achievement illustrates that families and communities can improve the healthy and safety of their home and community environments. People do care about giving children a healthy, beautiful home environment.

Training and establishing technical support team on sanitation and hygiene at all levels

Capacity building and technology development have become more important thrusts of the movement after the success to gain political will and commitment and to create demand from the community. In 1998, UNICEF has supported the training of 4 core trainers from Health sector and Youth League in each of 105 counties on sanitation technology and participatory hygiene education. In 1999, the local governments in Anhui province used their own resources to replicate the training down to township and village levels. A total of 14,170 people were trained including training of township officials, village cadres, doctors, youth league cadres, women heads and sanitation masons. Training materials on construction rural sanitary latrines, guidelines and design on sanitation technology have been modified and distributed to cities, counties, townships and villages so as to improve the technical capacity of local staff for better quality of construction and management of sanitation facilities. The technical support teams are established at all levels from province, county to township levels. They are in charge of training and supervising the technical aspects of the implementation of rural sanitation movement.

Conclusion

The UNICEF assisted project in 3 counties has set good models for replication in the whole province. So far there have been 20 model counties and nearly thousand of model villages.

Through the vigorous efforts of local government and related departments and active participation of the peasants, the coverage of sanitary latrine has increased from 9.7% 1995 to 34.47% in 1999. 2,970,000 new sanitary latrines have been built. The rural sanitation movement has changed the living standard of about 18 million peasants. Families have got rid of the filthy open pits and live in clean and comfortable home and community environment. Rural sanitation movement have significantly contributed to the progress of civilization in rural areas and the improvement of people's health.

Although rural sanitation movement in Anhui province can be considered a success, a number of problems and challenges still need to be overcome. They include insufficient of fund due to economic backward, insufficient communication to change traditional belief and practices, and insufficient involvement of private sectors in manufacturing the sanitation related products. We will surmount numerous difficulties and strive to improve environmental sanitation for the well being of the rural population, especially children and women.

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