



Sanitation promotion towards healthier life

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DEVELOPMENT, BY DEFINITION, is an ongoing effort recognized by both local and national governments and multinational agencies. This uncongealed concept assumes various shapes and forms based on overall need of its surrounding. In Bangladesh, the need seemed greatest in the sanitation sector. Both the Government of Bangladesh and the development partners recognized that in order to curb the high incidence of infections and parasitic diseases and reduce infant and child mortality, a comprehensive plan needed to be developed in the area of sanitation. Such realization prompted the Bangladesh Government to launch a national programme named “Social Mobilization for Sanitation”, in 1992 jointly with UNICEF to help increase the awareness of rural communities about the critical nature of sanitation and hygiene health practices. NGOs were identified as crucial partners in the effort, and NGO Forum for Drinking Water Supply & Sanitation (NGO Forum) was selected as the key agency to help implement the national programme.

NGO Forum implemented a three-year project as part of the national programme called “Social Mobilization (SocMob) for Sanitation”. The project was successfully implemented in three phases in 20 diarrhoea-prone thanas (sub-districts) from 1993 to 1996. Achievement of more than 90% sanitation coverage in project areas was confirmed by external evaluators.

Objectives of SocMob project

- Increase awareness of all communities of the benefits of sanitation
- Promote proper use of hygienic latrines by every families
- Promote affordable and appropriate technology in the use of sanitation

Results of project

- Increased use of latrines (90% +) & safe water for drinking (93%) and most of the domestic purposes
- Proper hand washing practices after defecation (91.6%)
- Maintenance of hygienic latrines (74.5%)
- An effective inter-agency collaboration
- Sustainability of the coverage achieved

Structure of “social mobilization” project

The inherent nature of the concept of social mobilization is such that the concept is immobile without the joint and active effort of the community. For the theory to materialize, it must take into account the basic premise of its

definition - ‘society’ and ‘mobility’. Society, as whole must mobilize its own members in pursuit of a common end, to achieve and sustain a common practice. The process of social mobilization, therefore, is concerned with the mobilizing human and indigenous resources. As needed, the process must employ all effective measures including, but are not limited to, creative sales techniques, strategic alliance with key groups, application of technology, and even hierarchical pressures.

NGO Forum was responsible for the overall coordination of the project. Unlike most other development projects, the SocMob project was developed with the intent of covering the entire population of the selected areas as “target population”. To achieve its overall objective within 100% of the household base, a step-by-step planning implementation process was developed and carried out. A brief description of this process is outlined below:

Step 1: programme planning and identification of individuals/groups

At the outset of the programme, a detailed master plan of action was formulated containing all the necessary activities for this project. Also the plan included management structures, frequency of status updates, mechanisms for progress reports, and an overall ‘how to direct’ the actual social mobilization task. Based on the master copy, specific plans for the each and every event were developed and distributed among the project staff hired by NGO Forum. Those plans were developed in such a form that enabled the project staff hired by NGO Forum to instate a strong effort down from the community level. How to build effective alliance with the local elite groups was also taken into due consideration while developing the activity plans. In order to ensure that each and every plan was meeting targeted the goals, several types of monitoring and reporting format were also developed and used throughout the project period, which greatly supported in keeping proper track of the activities’ progress.

Step 2: training and staff development

Following the recruitment, all the project staff (Thana Coordinators - TCs, Field Supervisors - FSs, and Field Extension Workers - FEWs) took part in intensive training courses facilitated by NGO Forum where issues like promotion and use of safe water, better sanitation and hygiene practices, effective interpersonal communication with rural households, community mobilization, programme plan-

ning, supervision, monitoring, and base line survey techniques were covered. These sessions implanted a solid foundation and imparted an in-depth knowledge on the tasks the project staff had performed.

Step 3: layout of organizational structure

A well laid out management structure and an effective decentralized structure were established for the project under which each of the FEWs and FSs had the clear idea regarding the reporting procedures and frequencies. Upon receipt of the summarized reports prepared by the FEWS and FSs, the TCs along with the respective Regional Chiefs of NGO Forum paid regular visit to the project areas to witness work progress and identify complex issues, which required their necessary inputs to get resolved.

Step 4 base line survey

As previously claimed, the "Social Mobilization" for Sanitation project aimed to increase awareness towards sanitation and hygiene promotion within its entire population instead of within a demographic subset of the area mass. To do that appropriately, an analysis of the existing inclination or mindset of the people needed to be evaluated. The result of the evaluation allowed the proper distribution of efforts towards the overall goal. An assessment of the existing situation was felt critical in determining how forcefully the sanitation messages needed to be established. To attain this end, a base line survey was conducted within 10% of the household of each thana. A structured questionnaire on sanitation, personal hygiene, diarrhoeal diseases and some socio-economic and demographic indicators was distributed among these 10% households randomly selected for this survey. In summary, the baseline survey gave a bird's eye view of the conditions of the sampled households.

Step 5: activities to mobilize society

The crust of the programme began at this point. Until now, the mobilizing taskforce were merely being equipped to handle the field activity, the task of negotiating, motivating, and increasing awareness about the water and sanitation reality.

The selected thanas were representatives of the country's overall village culture. People were generally conservative, and both the sexes maintained defined roles in society. It was observed immediately that to reach each and every household, measurable amount of forbearance coupled with tactful marketing techniques would be required. The FEWs were the major force in this regard as they were considered as the front end troops. They had the arduous task of motivating the masses towards hygienic sanitation. With the help of relevant IEC materials, home made latrine procedures, and the base line survey questions, they gained the comfort and trust of the village dwellers at an early stage. Subsequent to that, the following activities were performed:

- a) **Interpersonal communication:** Visit to each house was made by the FEWs in order to establish a pleasant interpersonal communication process with the household members. Focussing mainly on the sanitation issue they had discussion particularly with the female members of the households. They differentiated safe and unsafe water, explained the importance of hygiene latrines, advantages of home made latrines, hand washing practices, etc. This communication, personal in nature, proved to be the most effective activity in the social mobilization effort.
- b) **Construction of hygienic latrines:** Construction and use of the hygienic latrines for defecation by all the members was a crucial part in the overall design of the programme. During the interpersonal communication, this idea was instilled in them. Any pit latrines with cover, water-seal ring slab latrines, and septic tank latrines were used as examples of usable hygienic latrines. Public demonstrations were arranged at the village level with a view to imparting practical knowledge to the rural masses on "what does hygienic latrine mean" to the rural mass. Pit latrines were easy to make using available and inexpensive materials, the FEWs insisted. By making all these efforts, the construction of latrines was promoted and supported by the programme. By the end of the programme, the average number of hygienic latrines stood at about 90% in the project areas.
- c) **Hand washing after defecation:** Unclean hands are one of the leading causes for the transmission of diarrhoeal diseases. Therefore, it is incumbent on all that hands are cleaned after defecation to avoid any risk of transmitting diseases. The base line survey indicted little awareness in this area. Through rigorous motivational efforts, a big change in the behavioral side was observed. The number of people washing hands with soap, ash or soil went up from 46% to 91.2% within the entire targeted population.
- d) **Increased awareness in the causes of diarrhoea and dysentery:** The all encompassing goal of the water and sanitation programme was the reduction of water- and excreta-borne diseases. Research shows that while approximately 50 diseases originate from unhygienic latrines, 80 diseases are originated from contaminated water. One third of child mortality is caused by diarrhoeal diseases. These basic facts were conveyed to the dwellers of the project areas. Through creative and joint motivational efforts, this message was propagated throughout the entire target population. The subsequent survey found the number of people aware of water- and excreta-borne diseases rose from 51.4% to 73.9%.

Step 6: community participation and joint alliance

To successfully carry out a massive social mobilization of this nature requires creative marketing techniques. In a rural setting, such marketing maneuvers would include community participation, unimposing approaches, institutional participation, joint alliances with cultural and religious elite, cautious dealings with religious issues, mutual respect, and occasionally reasonable force. Following is a list of activities and other party actively involved in the SocMob project:

- a) **NGO orientation and agreement:** A participatory orientation workshop with partner NGOs were held with the intent to discuss in details the modus operandi of the SocMob project and the role of partner NGOs in it. Subsequent to the workshop, a draft implementation plan was developed and formal agreement on the roles and responsibility was signed.
- b) **Group meetings/discussion forums:** Group meetings facilitated by NGO Forum representatives, FSs, and local social elite were held regularly with household members. The presence of recognized faces made the discussion issues more acceptable to a generally dubious crowd.
- c) **Multiple committee formation:** This was another significant part of the project, which contributed to a great extent in achieving the project objectives. Various water and sanitation related committees starting from the village level to union, thana and district were formed comprising of the people of various strata. Individuals from the rural community to the government elected bodies, local NGOs, and indigenous influential groups were the part of those committees. The active participation of women in each and every committee was duly emphasized and ensured, which supported greatly in enhancing and establishing the fact that they do really possess the potential to contribute in the development of water and sanitation. All these committees were responsible for identifying and resolving issues and maintain cooperation among all the concerned groups. The local opinion heads and leaders often conveyed the sanitation messages to the locals.
- d) **Joint alliances:** This was, in essence, the crux of the programme. Alliances were developed with teachers, religious leaders, Ansar-VDP, partner NGOs, etc. The teachers conveyed the messages repeatedly in school settings, religious leaders explained that sanitation did not violate religious principles, and Ansar-VDP helped in demolishing few unhygienic latrines, which remained after much negotiation of closing them down. These alliances gave credibility to the programme, assisted in its implementation, and helped in ensuring the

sustainability issue, which was the most crucial part of the project.

- e) **Other communication materials and methods:** Along with the interpersonal communication, other means of traditional communication methods were deployed. These included miking, rallies, film shows, postering, and street meetings.

Discussion and lessons learned

Over the three years span of the project, these communication mechanisms, house visits, strategic joint alliances, etc. transformed this project from a concept to a concrete reality. The SocMob project was implemented without any technical barriers. Although latrines are made using modern hardware, creative 'self building' methods were taught. This avoided any need for technological and/or hardware assistance. Whenever possible, various NGOs including NGO Forum built water sealed latrines. But since financial feasibility needed to be considered, all efforts were made to construct hygiene latrines without involving high priced technology or hardware. The SocMob ensure that regardless of capacity, three basic criteria needed to be fulfilled. All latrines had to be:

- Underground with excreta deposited inside the pit
- Contamination proof
- Odor controlled i.e. the latrines had to be covered

Nonetheless, the SocMob activities created an enormous demand for latrine construction. Village-based latrines production centers witnessed a rapid sellout of latrine equipment. However, to truly understand the impact of the SocMob project, a post-implementation survey was carried out within the targeted areas. A comprehensive questionnaire was developed and distributed among 3121 sample respondents, which revealed interesting facts about the project. Some of which are as follows:

- Base line survey provided an overall scenario of existing conditions, which became the basis for project's action plan.
- Recruitment of female FEWs from the respective localities proved to be effective in building consensus among female house members.
- Interpersonal communication was the most effective mean of propagating the sanitation messages.
- Involving local social and cultural elite such as teachers, religious and opinion leaders, ANSAR-VDP to generate enthusiasm and help spread the messages was another crucial effort in this project.
- Involving local community based NGOs having strong working bases proved to be helpful.
- Demonstration of latrine construction was a successful activity. Majority of the population constructed their own latrines after learning from the public demonstration.

- As the project concentrated in disseminating only few selected messages, the targeted population found those much comfortable to treasure those into their mind all the time.
- Motivation is a powerful force. This manifested in the increased sales of water sealed latrines. The supply of hardware could not match existing demands.
- Communication materials, i.e. house visits and miking/rallying were two of the most effective marketing techniques.
- People in general understood the importance of hygienic latrine usage, which was demonstrated by greater number of people using hygienic latrines compared to the base line survey.
- Training for all project workers and alliance members provided a sense of teamwork among the members. It also taught basic communication skills, highlighted cautionary grounds, and made them aware of sanitation needs. Their knowledge and commitment to the cause expedited the convincing job for the NGO workers.
- Deviating from traditional NGO setup by covering the entire target population proved to be a calculative decision.
- Detailed action plan and a linear reporting structure ensured a balanced functioning of the project.

Conclusion

The “Social Mobilization for Sanitation” project, by any account, was viewed as a success and has the potential to become a model, an exemplar for future development projects. From the contours of the base line survey to the completion of the post-implementation study, the project was planned and implemented according to overall objectives. The final result reflects more than a mere numerical success statement. Rather, the increased level of awareness towards sanitation represents a vast cultural change within the targeted population. The momentum for this change was created by the SocMob project. Expectations are high that this change will sustain itself on its own merits. As the village mass breed and feed new generation of children, our hope is that the lessons learned from this project will become part of their daily norms. Naturally, only the future will tell us how well they have learned!

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