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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF WATER RESOURCES, WATER SUPPLY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION

Screened Toilet, Bathing and Menstruation Units for the Earthquake Response in NWFP,¹ Pakistan*Jamila Nawaz, Shamma Lal, Saira Raza and Sarah House, Pakistan*

In water and sanitation interventions, sensitivity is required for the particular needs of communities when women live in seclusion. In these communities female-headed households may have restricted access to relief supplies and restricted opportunities to make their needs known. Additional screening around water and sanitation facilities can help to provide additional privacy for women and men living in camp environments in emergency settings.

Women living in seclusion

In October 2005, an earthquake of 7.4 on the Richter Scale with its epicentre in Azad Jammu Kashmir affected large areas of northern Pakistan. Most of the people affected by the earthquake were Muslim and many of the women affected, living in remote areas, followed the practice of 'Purdah'². In some of these communities women keep all but their faces and hands covered when leaving their shelters or homes and are only able to interact with men if they are members of their direct family.

In some of the rural mountain villages in northern Pakistan, *purdah* prevented women from female-headed households from coming down the mountainside to collect relief supplies and tents. Subsequently, OXFAM's partner staff from Sungi Development Foundation made additional visits into the mountains to collect information on the needs of women-headed households and then arranged delivery by mule.

A number of camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) known as 'tented villages' were set up below the mountainous areas, where people could come for shelter during the winter months. OXFAM provided water, sanitation and undertook hygiene promotion activities in a number of

these camps in Mansehra and Abbotabad districts. In these particular camps, in the context of the emergency, women were able to move outside their tents and hence were able to use communal facilities.

Sanitation and bathing facilities in camps

Discussions were held within the OXFAM-GB Public Health Engineering (PHE) and Public Health Promotion (PHP) Teams, drawing on knowledge of local team members about how far to separate men's and women's facilities and then users were consulted on whether initial facilities were acceptable. As a result, a screened toilet and bathing block was developed (Photos 1 and 2).

The blocks were first constructed in a makeshift hospital and then in Jabba Farm in a range of sizes. Standardised designs were then developed for Havelian tented village to maximise space with minimum materials. After standardisation³, some of the frame units were manufactured off-site by OXFAM's partner, Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme, and then fixed together on site. In general the screened toilet and bathing blocks were appreciated and people felt that they provided security and privacy.



Photograph 1. Screened toilet and bathing unit



Photograph 2. Looking inside a screened latrine and toilet block

General principles behind the screened blocks:

1. Women and men should not be able to see each other as they enter the toilet or bathing units.
2. When space was limited and men’s and women’s blocks had to be next to each other, it was ensured that the entrances were at the opposite ends of the blocks to try and maintain as much separation as possible.
3. It was important to construct screened facilities for men as well as for women, as this also gave the men a degree of privacy in the camp scenario. It also ensured that women would not feel uncomfortable seeing, or walking by, the men when they were entering toilets or bathing units.
4. The hand-washing facilities should be located near to the door so that the users will remember to use them after using the latrines as they leave the blocks.

Menstruation

Women and girls use a variety of ways to cope with the loss of menstrual blood. Younger and older women from the same communities may use different methods. Some use products such as sanitary towels / pads, but many use cloth which may be re-used by washing and drying. Some women bleed into boxer shorts or saris and some use plastic or natural materials to catch and soak up the blood (Milligan, 1987).

In most cultures menstruation is a taboo subject and women do not discuss the issue often, even with other women. Therefore dealing with menstruation needs a significant degree of privacy. This is less available in the context of an IDP or refugee camp, particularly where the girl or woman’s shelter space may be limited to a one room tent or a self built shelter which is shared with her family. In northern Uganda, Concern and UNICEF worked to support women with their menstruation needs and supported them with appropriate cotton materials, soap, basins and bathing units. They also included training on how to use the materials and additional

awareness-raising on gender based violence (Bwengye-Kahororo and Twanza, 2005). In Pakistan, the OXFAM-GB programme trailed the use of special menstruation units in addition to bathing units.

Through individual and focus group discussions, the team discussed with the women in the camps, their needs for washing and drying their menstrual cloths. The women’s initial preferences were for “menstruation units” to be included within the existing screened bathing blocks (in preference to having separate units in a more secluded area on the edge of the camp), so that when they were entering, no-one would know that they were going in for that purpose (photos 3, 4 and 5).

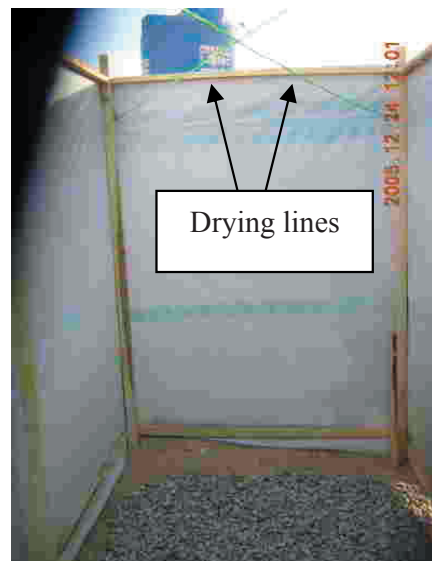
Therefore the PHE team included menstruation or ‘hygiene units’ where women could wash and dry their menstrual cloths into some of the women’s toilet and bathing units. The block shown in Figure 1, has a single hygiene unit included in it next to the bathing units.

Issues to consider when supporting women and girls with dealing with their menstruation needs:

1. What do women and girls usually use for dealing with their menstruation – cloths, sanitary pads etc? Make sure the required materials are provided with or alongside hygiene kits (if cloth is provided this should be of a dark colour and never white).
2. It is essential that the women and girls are asked what they want in terms of facilities for dealing with menstruation, for if the facility is not exactly what they would feel secure to use, then it is unlikely that it will be used.
3. If disposable sanitary pads are to be provided then facilities for effective collection and disposal are essential. Where waste disposal is not effective, there will always be the risk that used sanitary pads will end up on piles of refuse thrown into the road or public areas. This is



Photograph 3. Washing slab for menstrual cloths inside a screened block



Photograph 4. Washing lines for drying the cloths

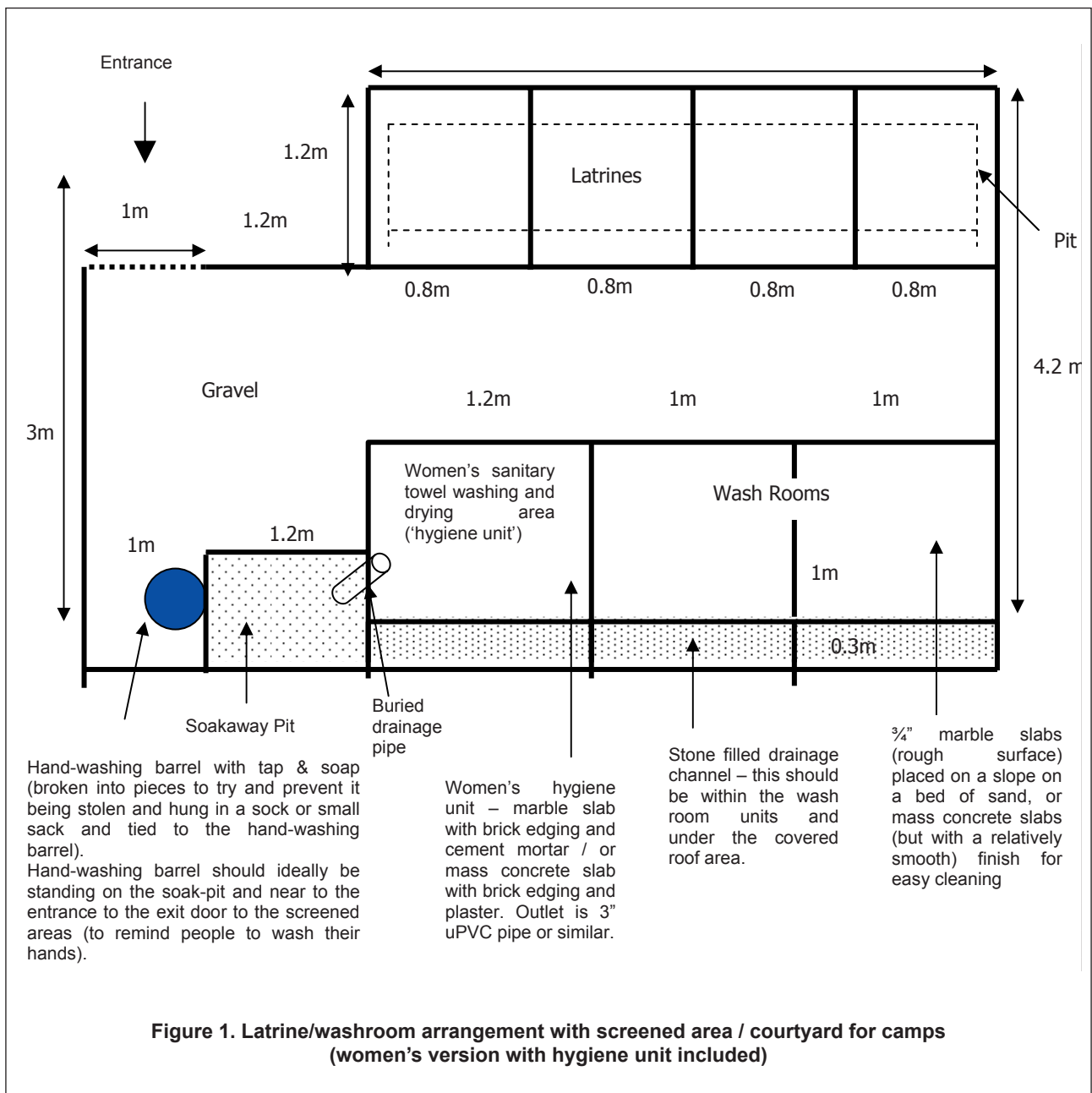
- unhygienic, unsightly, and could pose a risk to health.
- If areas are designed for women to wash and dry their menstrual cloths, then other people should not be able to see any blood coloured water coming from the unit when the cloths are washed, or see the towels being dried. The sides of any units should be high enough that no-one can see inside.

Feedback on the menstruation ‘hygiene’ units in Pakistan

In Jabba Farm tented village, the separate units were constructed inside the existing screened latrine and bathing block structures. Women appreciated having separate units within the latrine blocks to wash and in some cases dry their menstruation cloths. The only exception was one hygiene



Photograph 5. Slightly raised sides for additional privacy and an additional internal unit (top left) which included the ‘hygiene unit’



unit which was overlooked by higher ground where the women felt insecure as men sometimes sat on the upper zone and could look in.

In Havelian tented village however, the additional units were added on the outside of the standardised toilet and bathroom blocks, as there was not enough space to add them inside, but with the door entering from inside the block. Here, the women would not use the units even though they had requested them. This was because both men and women became curious as to what was inside the extended blocks, and as their walls were made of tarpaulin they could be easily punctured. This made women feel insecure. These women reported that instead they washed their cloths in the bathing units and then hung them up to dry with their clothes, but covered them with another item so that they could not be seen.

Users recommendations for improvement

Based on the feedback from users of the facilities, a number of recommendations can be made:

1. Put wooden doors on the toilet and bathing units or a corridor on the entrance, so that when the plastic sheet is lifted for someone to enter, then nobody can see from outside.
2. The women from Havelian tented village recommended that the menstruation units should be constructed away from the living areas and that the walls should not be of tarpaulin. They also requested piped water inside the block and wooden doors (also with an internal lock).
3. The earlier design requests in Havelian camp also requested to include a mirror, a rail to hang their bathing towels and a seat within the hygiene units.
4. Additional care is needed to ensure that there is no way that the menstruation units can be seen into from outside, which is a particular concern for terraced areas. Women in Jabba suggested that half of the roof could be covered and half left open.
5. For the bathing units, after some time the marble slabs started to become slippery and therefore it is recommended to find an alternative material for future blocks.

Notes

1. NWFP is North Western Frontier Province in Pakistan.
2. Seclusion/Purdah is sometimes practised by women who are Muslim in a number of countries and also by some Hindu women in India, although different communities practice it in different ways and to different degrees. It is sometimes the case that the women previously living in seclusion will have more freedom to leave their living areas in emergency situations.
3. The standardised block was designed by Bibi Lamond.

References

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