

38th WEDC International Conference, Loughborough University, UK, 2015

**WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES BEYOND 2015:
IMPROVING ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

**Learning from the implementation of the Sanitation and
Hygiene Master Plan in Nepal**

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BRIEFING PAPER 2157

This briefing paper has been prepared based on the basis of field level experiences. It highlights the emerging decentralized leadership in the WASH sector in light of the Master Plan and ODF movement in Nepal. The Master Plan has introduced innovative institutional arrangement of inclusive WASH Coordination Committees to lead ODF movement. These committees leadership of such committees has come up with several innovations in planning, financing, implementation and monitoring, and promoting inclusive and participatory governance process in sanitation development. Nepal's sanitation campaign has visibly scaled up ODF status despite some shortcomings. Mobilization of local resources is possible through local leadership, sustainability requires equal emphasis on behavioural and facility aspects and advocacy for health benefits of the improved sanitation are the prime drivers for changes. Similarly, cross-learning are vital for innovations in the sector and integration of sanitation with other development sector activities enhances synergy. The post-ODF intervention is leading the sanitation sector towards livelihood promotion and social wellbeing aspect too.

Background

The systematic promotion of sanitation in Nepal dates back to 1980s (GoN 2011). At this stage, the external entities--Government, UN Agencies and Non Government Organizations--had played dominant role to promote sanitation activities. There was very little role of the community people in the sanitation development process. Later, Users' Committees were formed and engaged to facilitate water supply and sanitation activities. However, these committees could not establish the sanitation and hygiene as the cross cutting theme of the development and synergize the efforts of different sector stakeholders. In order to address such shortcomings, the Government of Nepal introduced school-based sanitation program in 2000 in collaboration with UNICEF. The program visibly strengthened the leadership of teachers and students and promoted school and community partnership to lead sanitation programs (Adhikari 2012). The results from this intervention remained amazing to cultivate the culture of good hygiene among students, promote hand washing with soap in school and households and institutionalize child clubs' leadership. The concept of total sanitation introduced in Nepal in 2003 further widened the scope of stakeholder's collaboration for achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and other hygiene behaviors.

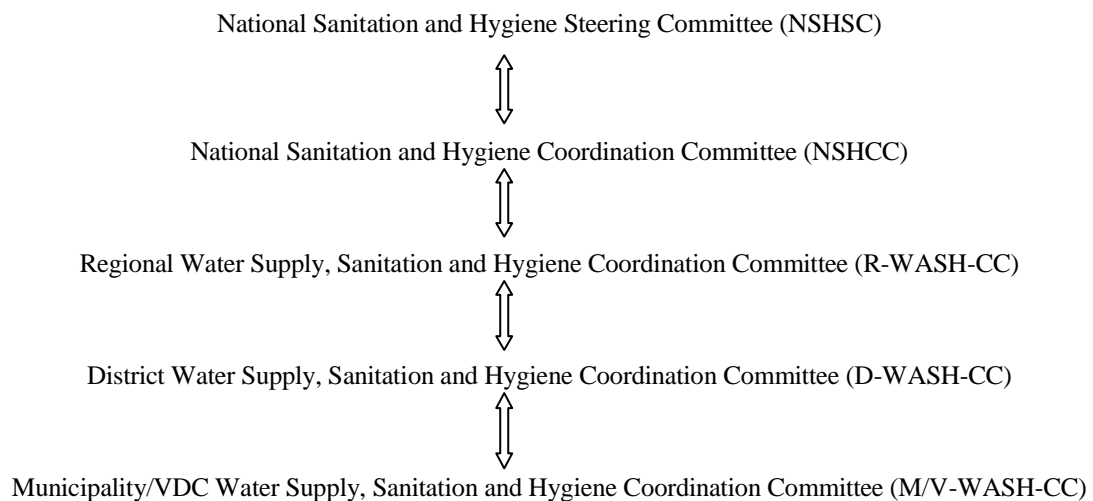
Emerging dimension in leadership

Nepal's sanitation sector entered the new era after the enforcement of the Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan in 2011. The Government of Nepal formulated the Master Plan by recognizing the power of collaboration. This learning was achieved from school and community based sanitation interventions. The Master Plan has envisaged that centralized planning and stakeholder's fragmented efforts are the key barriers in the sanitation sector. So, it has institutionalized regional, district, municipality and Village Development Committee (VDC) level WASH Coordination Committees (WASH-CCs) to promote local leadership, unify stakeholders' efforts, pool local resources, promote basket planning, institutionalize self-monitoring and sustain hygiene behaviors. Importantly, it has set the following 9 point guiding principles to promote local leadership and maintain uniformity and standard of all sanitation and hygiene interventions. These

institutional and policy frameworks have thus enabled local bodies to successfully run the ODF campaign in the form of a social movement. These days the proper harmonization of local body's leadership, stakeholder's partnership, private sector's market ship and community's ownership has accelerated the ODF campaign throughout the country.

- ODF should be the bottom line of all sanitation interventions.
- There should be universal access to sanitation facilities in the water supply and sanitation project areas.
- Communities should have informed technological choices for household toilets.
- Local bodies should lead sanitation sector activities.
- VDC and municipality should be the minimum basic unit of all sanitation program intervention.
- Locally managed financial support mechanism should be promoted.
- There should be mandatory provisions of sanitation facilities in all institutions.
- There should be mandatory provision of toilet in new built up buildings.
- Focus should be laid on hand washing with soap and other basic behavior build up process.

Although the Master Plan has institutionalized the coordination mechanism and WASH-CCs up to the level of municipalities and VDCs (the lowest administrative and development unit), such WASH-CCs are formed up to school's catchment, Ward, clusters and Tole levels too. This coordination mechanism has promoted horizontal and vertical linkages, communication and synergy among stakeholders, strengthened co-funding opportunities and promoted self-monitoring and follow up process. The linkage of these committees institutionalized by the Master Plan is as follows:



This decentralized institutional arrangement at grass root level has visibly fostered inclusion, participation and local leadership to run and sustain ODF campaign from within. Apart from it, such coordination mechanism also exists in the form of sub-committees (e.g. women's committees, child club's committees, youth's committees, etc.) and contributes to achieve the sanitation target set locally. Hence, the Master Plan has created an enabling environment, enabled all sector stakeholders to work in a collaborative manner and lead the sanitation campaign using local intelligence, efforts and resources.

Innovation through local leadership

The sanitation sector in Nepal has been enriched with a number of good initiations and innovations in terms of local level planning, financing, advocacy, implementation and monitoring backed by the local leadership. As a result, the ODF movement in Nepal is moving ahead in an encouraging manner. It has been found that the rate of increase in toilet coverage has gained significant impetus after the enforcement of the Master Plan in 2011. The data released by the National Information Management Project (NMIP) of the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage (DWSS) in 2011 shows 43.04 % sanitation coverage by 2010 while the report of Central Bureau of Statistics 2012 (on National Population and Housing Census 2011) shows that this coverage reached 62% by 2012. The NMIP/DWSS data released in 2014 shows 70.28% coverage. The number of ODF declared VDCs and Municipalities increased significantly from 144 VDCs in 2009/2010 to 1565 VDCs and 68 Municipalities by 2015 (ESS/DWSS 2015). However, the pace for ODF declaration is comparatively less encouraging in the Terai (flat land) districts where the cultural, technological, settlement

and geographical factors have considerably hindered construction and use of toilets and adoption of other hygiene behaviours. Similarly, the provision of facilities for persons with disabilities is lacking in public places. Maintaining ODF status across the highway areas in the absence of effective public toilet management also stands a key challenge. So, the DWSS has initiated to undertake a comprehensive study on the sustainability of ODF status together with UNICEF Nepal and stakeholders and draw some lessons for policy and planning level feedback. Besides, the post-ODF activities are being carried out by DWSS, UNICEF, WHO Nepal and stakeholders to scale up the quality of facilities and promote hygiene behaviours-personal hygiene including menstrual hygiene, food and water hygiene and environmental cleanliness. Despite these limitations, the following innovative and emerging leadership held at wider sectoral levels have significantly contributed to bring this marked change in the sanitation sector:

- **Strategic planning:** All district, municipalities and VDCs formulate the strategic plan to promote ODF campaign. The strategic plan is a joint plan that brings all stakeholders in a common platform and promotes their collaboration to achieve a common target of sanitation through unified planning, financing, implementation and monitoring arrangements. School's catchment, Ward, clusters and Tole levels committees also execute the grass-root level Joint Plan of Action to help achieve the sanitation target of municipalities and VDCs.
- **Fund generation and mobilization:** Unlike the externally supported project based approach, the local level WASH-CCs have begun to promote local level fund generation mechanism to fulfill resource gap in the sanitation sector. For example, the D-WASH-CC in Dang, Rupandehi and Sunsari districts in Nepal have effectively generated the local level funds through collection of 'donation' and other 'charity means'. Besides, the child clubs in schools are also engaged in collecting local level funds through lottery, launching of cultural programs, etc. Forest Users Groups also provide wood as a token of support. Mostly, such fund and support is mobilized to assist people who are unable to build toilet on their own. Through ODF campaign, some local entrepreneurs are engaged in producing and selling sanitation materials such as concrete rings, toilet pans, etc.
- **Concerted advocacy campaign:** The mass media people in Nepal have effectively run advocacy campaign for sanitation in national and sub-national levels. Formation of the Journalist WASH-CC (J-WASH-CC) at district level is a good example of group dynamics and local leadership. The J-WASH-CC in Pyuthan, Sindhupalchowk and Parsa districts have strongly pronounced the issues of sanitation and undertaken the robust monitoring especially for ODF verification process. In the following days, the formation and engagement of J-WASH-CC is being popular in other districts as well.
- **Self-monitoring:** Before the enforcement of the Master Plan, either central or district level stakeholders used to monitor the sanitation program in the communities. Such a monitoring remained extremely feeble to unite, motivate and activate the communities for leading sanitation action. So, several self-monitoring teams have been engaged at very grass root levels to monitor the hygiene and sanitation activities based on locally set indicators.
- **Local level ODF verification:** Various level WASH-CCs take lead to monitor, verify and endorse ODF declaration process on the basis of local level indicators. This locally held practice and process of verification has helped institutionalize local leadership and ownership in sanitation development.
- **Child club as the catalytic agent:** Child club members take photographs of good and bad sanitation and hygiene practices in communities and put comments on each photograph. These photographs are then displayed in school premises by organizing a big community gathering. All the members of community observe these photographs in a group. This live depiction of community situation led by the child clubs had strongly motivated the community people to achieve improved hygiene and sanitation condition in Darechowk VDC in Chitwan district. Joint community visit by teachers and child clubs also help persuade parents and fellow students for better hygiene practices.
- **Enforcement of local level norms:** The local bodies, WASH-CCs and communities have stated open defecation as a social crime. This announcement has become supportive to prohibit the malpractice of open defecation through enforcement of local level rules, regulation, norms and code of conducts. Local bodies have begun to issue sanitation card as a basis to monitor the sanitation facilities in the households.
- **Health personnel as change agent:** Health personnel conduct community visits and share evidence based learning with community people about the positive implications of ODF situation in public health.

It largely implants positive feelings in people's mind set to adopt proper hygiene and sanitation behaviors. While preparing medical prescriptions, they sensitize the patients for using toilet and other hygiene behaviors.

- **Religious groups in action:** The issues of sanitation are highlighted through priests and Bhajan Mandali (a group reciting religious songs) to trigger the aged people, especially those possessing religious faith and beliefs, for adopting good hygiene behaviors. The locally held cultural ceremonies play vital role in promoting sanitation behaviors in joyful ways.
- **ODF as a development ladder:** Along with the ODF campaign, other development initiatives such as declaration of 'smoke free houses', 'alcohol free communities' and 'plastic bags free villages' are becoming popular. The ODF campaign has equally contributed to achieve 'total immunization village', 'total enrolment households' and 'total literate communities'. These days, post-ODF intervention in Nepal has focused on sustainability of ODF as well as livelihood and income generation aspects. Therefore, the ODF campaign has become the first step of the development ladder. This is a distinctive feature of ODF movement in Nepal.

Conclusion and key learning

These days, sanitation has been recognized as a cross-cutting theme of development in Nepal. The WASH-CCs have reinforced collaboration of different sector stakeholders and local leadership for sanitation promotion. Localization of this inclusive institutional arrangement has fostered decentralized and inclusive governance, the basis of sustainability. Apart from it, generation and mobilization of local level resources has reduced dependency. Unified planning, financing, implementation and joint monitoring have reinforced togetherness among sector stakeholders for hygiene and sanitation promotion. This unique institutional arrangement of WASH-CC in Nepal thus appears as an exclusive innovation to lead the sanitation sector and accelerate ODF and post-ODF movement in the form of an aggressive social movement despite some shortcomings in sustaining key hygiene behaviours in school and communities, especially hand washing with soap.

Nepal has learned some important lessons in this regard: a) inclusion, participation and local leadership are the major basis to build stakeholders' ownership and scale up sanitation at scale, b) religious and cultural occasions can effectively persuade communities for sanitation campaign, c) behaviour and facilities should complement each other to sustain ODF situation, d) health benefits of the improved sanitation are the prime drivers for sustaining behavioural changes, e) unification of efforts of stakeholders can fulfil the resource gap and promote cross-learning for sanitation interventions, f) locally held tools are more powerful in sanitation mission than readymade tools and approaches, g) promotion of sanitation and hygiene need to be linked with education, health, environmental management, livelihood and income generation for sustainable outcomes and h) sustainable post-ODF intervention requires a move towards livelihood aspects as well.

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