



Promoting school sanitation and hygiene education in rural Gujarat: The WASMO experience

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Getting people to learn better hygiene and sanitation habits – and to stick to them – can be a tall order. But when village water committees, schools and local NGOs acted in partnership with government in Gujarat, the result was a wealth of enthusiastic and creative activities.

More than two million children die every year due to sanitation-related illnesses. This accounts for around 15 per cent of all deaths of under-fives in developing countries.¹

Vision 21, launched by the World Water and Sanitation Collaboration Council at the Second World Water Forum in March 2000, describes a future for water and sanitation for 2025 as one in which virtually every man, woman and child will know the importance of hygiene and will enjoy safe and adequate water and sanitation. Communities and governments will benefit from the resulting improved health and related economic development.²

If all of these goals are to be met, then it is important to target school-age children, since these will be the next generation. School sanitation and hygiene refers to the combination of hardware and software components necessary to produce a healthy school environment and to develop or support safe hygiene behaviours. The hardware components include drinking water facilities in and around the school campus. The software components are the activities that promote conditions at school and practices of school staff and children that help prevent water- and sanitation-related diseases and parasites such as worms.

Effective sanitation and hygiene in schools involves a healthy physical environment, active and organized

children, trained and committed school personnel and links to home and the community. In Gujarat, the Water and Sanitation Management Organisation (WASMO) has successfully reached out to children through innovative and carefully designed programmes in 1,340 of the 2,410 villages wherein WASMO is currently engaged.³

Sanitation programmes in India

In India, around 180 million days are lost annually due to waterborne disease, at a cost of \$280 million. The

Government of India has launched a Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) to encourage the building of sanitation facilities in rural areas, with the broader goal to eradicate the practice of open defecation. This programme is being run in 520 of the 602 districts in the country, with UNICEF support in 130 districts. A nominal subsidy in the form of an incentive is provided to poor rural households for toilet construction. Information, education and communication (IEC) are emphasized, together with capacity building and hygiene education for effective behaviour change with



School sanitation corners proved an effective entry point for launching project activities while providing much-needed facilities.



Volunteers developed a great rapport with school children

the involvement of local government and civil society.⁴

Gujarat: reaching out

Inculcating the practice of sanitation and adopting clean hygienic habits are challenging tasks. Experience indicates that communities express greater interest and readiness to invest in drinking water supply than in construction of toilets and sanitation.

In 2002, the Government of Gujarat set up the Water and Sanitation Management Organisation or WASMO as an autonomous institution to facilitate community-managed drinking water supply and sanitation facilities. WASMO is currently working with local NGOs to implement water supply and sanitation projects with the community through the formation of *pani samitis* (village water and sanitation committees) in 1300 villages. The communities are facilitated and technically and financially supported by WASMO. NGOs functioning as implementation support agencies (ISAs) work with the villagers, empowered through various rigorous capacity-building measures.

Since 2003, WASMO has made special efforts to reach out to school-children to promote environmental sanitation for a clean habitat, encouraging the use of toilets and hygienic practices. While the children learn about hygiene and use sanitation facilities in their schools, they also serve as agents of change, carrying home the message of hygienic practices. Children attending school in all the 1300 primary schools have been targeted through software and hardware activities. In fact, in some villages, the construction of School Sanitation Corners proved to be an effective entry point activity for launching water supply projects.

Important issues

Issues that were highlighted included:

- washing hands after defecation, before cooking and eating meals
- maintaining personal hygiene by cutting nails, brushing teeth, bathing, combing hair
- keeping drinking water clean
- keeping houses, streets and the village clean
- preventing open defecation and using toilets; and
- maintaining water quality.

Effective approaches

Special campaigns were launched to promote sanitation and educate children about hygienic practices. There were hardware campaigns to construct sanitation facilities, and a software campaign in the form of intensive information, education and communication activities.

Construction activities in schools included building rooftop rainwater harvesting systems for supplying water for drinking and washing hands, handwashing facilities, urinals and separate toilets for girls and boys, and installing dustbins.

Different and interesting approaches were adopted for an intensive IEC campaign to ensure that the messages communicated were relevant, participatory and practical. Since schools across several villages were to be reached, capable and interested volunteers were sent for after-school activities and these proved successful (see Box 1).

Some of the activities undertaken during the campaign included:

Distribution of print material. Posters and pamphlets on various issues were distributed in schools and amongst villagers, government staff and NGOs.

Name stickers for text and notebooks. These name stickers carried couplets on various health and hygiene issues and were a big hit with the children.

Writing slogans. Slogans depicting the perils of poor sanitation and hygiene and hygienic practices were painted on the walls of prominent buildings, in schools and along high-ways. These slogans were selected through a competition wherein senior students from 360 rural schools

participated and 160 entries were selected.

Competitions. Drawing and essay competitions, sanitation puzzles, plays, forecast games, personal hygiene boards and passbooks, teaching songs, story telling, snakes and ladders and the distribution of nail cutters all formed part of school activities. Winners of these competitions as well as neatly dressed children received awards.

Street plays. *Lok dayros* (a traditional folk form of story telling in Saurashtra that uses poetry and rhythm to get messages across) and plays by schoolchildren focusing on basic health, hygiene and environmental sanitation were performed.

Rallies. Children and elders walked along village streets with placards of sanitation and hygiene issues, shouting slogans, exhorting the community to use toilets and practice hygiene.

Using special days to get the message across. For example, in Kathawa village, students performed a play on Republic Day called *Bhagdo gandaki* ('Throw the dirt out!') to inform about sanitation practices. On the last day of 2003, in a school in Devgad village, groups of children cleaned up the village. They were given lessons in personal hygiene like handwashing and taking a bath every day. On Republic Day, 2004, exactly three years after the devastating earthquake in Bhuj, the children of Nanavirani village paid tribute to those who lost their lives by starting the day with a *Jan Jagrun yatra* (public awareness walk). On Martyrs' Day, 2004, the children of Naranpar Ravri village took matters into their own hands and, armed with brooms and buckets, cleaned up this prosperous but dirty village. In a school health programme, the personal hygiene of each student was checked, and deserving children were awarded prizes. The children took an oath to observe personal hygiene. On Makarsankranti, a five-day kite-flying festival, some 1,800 kites carrying sanitation messages were distributed to students in 230 primary schools across 100 villages.

School sanitation committees in schools: Student school sanitation committees or Eco Clubs were set up in primary schools in 25 villages. These clubs typically consist of different



Slogans written by the schoolchildren themselves are painted on the school walls

committees formed by children with specific responsibilities. In the primary school in Gundi village of Bhavnagar District, for example, five student committees consisting of five students each were formed. Each committee has a defined responsibility: to maintain cleanliness in and around the school; maintain hygiene in the School Sanitation Corner; water plants and trees; check the personal hygiene of the students every Thursday; and, ensure appropriate waste disposal and maintenance of dustbins in the school. Practical sanitation kits, consisting of a broom, dustbin, washing powder and phenyl, were given to help them keep their school premises clean.

Planting trees as part of eco-sanitation: Saplings of fruit-bearing and avenue trees were planted in the school campus and other places in the village by school children.

Training programmes. Sessions on sanitation, health and hygiene were organized for school children, teachers and the village community to promote hygiene practices, the use of sanitation facilities and maintaining a clean village and household environment. Audio visual aids were extensively used while imparting training.

Efforts are made to change the behavioural pattern of adults as well. Through all these efforts, the children are not only informed, but they act as

informers as well as they participate in street plays organized by the NGOs and undertake rallies to spread the message of sanitation and hygiene. NGOs work with women's self-help groups and the *pani samitis* to spread the word. Pamphlets and posters prepared by WASMO on issues such as toilet options, the need to wash hands, hygiene practices, the impact of poor water quality, and practices to keep water clean are distributed. These issues are also discussed in *gram sabhas* that involve the whole village community. Messages are spread through fairs and exhibitions as well.

Conclusions

It is often difficult to convince villagers to adopt sanitation and hygiene practices, since they have been following other habits for years and there exists a great knowledge gap. This gap needs to be bridged by consistent information and knowledge bombardment. The methods used by WASMO, using all platform and media for spreading awareness, are based on planning and large-scale efforts aimed at reaching large audiences in the shortest possible time.

These efforts are beginning to bear fruit as is evident from small but increasingly visible changes. The number of children who have begun to maintain personal hygiene is slowly but

surely growing. They are realizing the importance of sanitation and are demanding the same at home. Attendance in schools has increased and is ascribed by the school teachers to a decline in disease due to better hygiene. Quantitative data to support this is being collected. In many primary schools the premises and surroundings are clean and hygiene practices have significantly picked up thanks to the efforts of the school teachers. In a school in Kutch District, a school teacher himself gives a bath to children who come to school unbathed.

The lessons learnt during these two years are being incorporated into future efforts.

About the author

Dr Indira Khurana is the Documentation Consultant of the External Advisory Services provided to WASMO by the Royal Netherlands Embassy, New Delhi. Information and photographs provided by WASMO are gratefully acknowledged.

References

- 1 IRC/UNICEF (2001) 'School sanitation and hygiene education: a background paper'.
- 2 Op. cit.
- 3 Water and Sanitation Management Organisation (2005) *Annual Report 2004-2005*, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.
- 4 TSC website, ddws.nic.in/tsc-nic/html/index.html

Box 1. Volunteer victory

A four-member volunteer team in Nakhatrana and Abdasa talukas in Bhuj District wrought wonders in the hygiene habits of children. The team visited more than 25 schools and interacted with the children. Posters and stickers carrying various messages were explained and distributed. Messages were also explained through games and plays. The children were revisited several times to monitor change.

The team became so popular that the moment they were spotted, the children would run up to them to show their neatly combed hair and clean and trimmed nails.

Source: Annual Report 2003-2004, Water and Sanitation Management Organisation, Gandhinagar, p 50.