An unfolding story

Phad, a traditional storytelling technique, chronicles the saga of community involvement in rural water supply and sanitation.

Women, children and men of Barwara village in the heart of India watch in wide-eyed amazement as a brightly coloured 12 metre length of cloth is unfurled in front of them. There is a giggle here and a gasp there, as a story emerges from deep in the folds of the cloth. Panel after panel flashes past their eyes, projecting familiar day to day aspects of their own lives in front of them.

The language is their very own Bundeli (spoken in the region of Bundelkhand of Uttar Pradesh State) and the story is about Ramu and Rani, but in fact it could be of any of the couples sitting among the audience. It chronicles the participation of the village in the Swajal Project — a programme on community involvement in the rural water supply and sanitation sector.

What distinguishes this unique experiment is its use of the traditional form of communication, the storytelling technique of Phad used in an era much before the advent of “infotainment”. Royal story-tellers would travel from village to village carrying pictorial depictions of various battles and adventures undertaken by kings. The panels and pictures made their narratives much more vivid, colourful and exciting.

Rather than abandon this age old practice used both by former feudal rulers as well as the folk entertainers of the area, a local all-woman NGO, Vanangana, has chosen to resurrect this technique and produced two full length Phads. The organisation has been working in the area since 1993 and its core staff comprises local women. It provides legal aid as well as imparts technical skills to women in response to their needs.

Vanangana soon realised the advantages of this mode, since it was effective in conveying messages to the vast majority of illiterate people in the region without having to preach to them. Though storytelling itself was not an easy vocation, its roots lay in the traditions of the villages, making the task easier.

Another advantage of Phad is that it can be produced locally in a short time and made context specific to the area in which the message is to be transmitted. Languages and dialogues can be changed rapidly, while the visual element is distinctive to the locality and thus familiar to the audience.

The two Phads produced by Vanangana tell the story of the planning and the implementation stage of the Swajal project. In the first, two young girls, Chuniya and Muniya, weighed down by the water crisis in their village including the spread of water borne diseases, are excited by the coming of Vanangana field level facilitators to the village. They monitor the planning phase with great interest and excitement as it covers the technological options offered, as well as the community’s growing involvement with the project.
It can be effective in conveying messages to the vast majority of illiterate people in the region.

The sometimes painful process of collection of contributions from the villagers to establish their ownership as well as selection of the Village Water and Sanitation Committee are made simple by their constant banter. They also play a critical role in convincing and cajoling their parents, especially their mothers, to participate.

In the second Phad, the story of Ramu and Rani highlights the issue of gender imbalance. Says Ramu, "Rani, all you do is sit by the well and gossip with your friends. You even find time to gossip when the well dries up." Retorts Rani, "If you were to see how red and blistered my hands get from fetching the water from far off places you would not make such statements." These everyday innocuous domestic conversations played out in the open, provide valuable insights into not only sharing of chores but also of larger issues like water availability. In addition, other issues like community involvement, transparency and corruption, the Swajali Project itself and even the role of external support agencies like the World Bank are examined and discussed.

PARTNERSHIPS

Strategic alliance signed

Collaboration to promote sustained access of rural poor to improved water and sanitation services

The Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission (The Mission) has entered into a unique three-year strategic alliance with the Regional Water and Sanitation Group for South Asia (RWSG-SA) with the objective of assisting the rural poor in India gain sustained access to improved water and sanitation services. An agreement between the two agencies was signed in June this year.

To achieve this objective, the Mission and the RWSG-SA (a regional hub of the global UNDP-World Bank Water and Sanitation Program) recognise the need for "significant reforms" in approaches to service delivery in the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) sector.

The reforms will focus on new institutional arrangements (including new roles for Governmental, non-governmental and private bodies), new financing mechanisms (including cost sharing with beneficiaries and innovative financing mechanisms), greater community control and involvement in decisions affecting service provision.

This non-exclusive partnership will assist both parties in strengthening their relationship by focusing on complementary roles to forge a collaborative relationship. To ensure this, each associate will draw on its strengths to add dynamism to the overall objective of making safe and sustainable water as well as sanitation services available to India's rural population. It is generally accepted that the lack of these vital services remains a limiting factor to economic growth and a significant cause of poverty and ill health.

Each partner has a clearly defined role in the alliance. The responsibilities of the Mission include sharing vital information with RWSG-SA on policy directions and trends in national thinking. The RWSG-SA's responsibilities include assisting the Mission in accelerating ongoing RWSS policy reforms by promoting the use of a demand responsive approach, including increasing user cost recovery in the delivery of rural water and sanitation services. The RWSG-SA will also seek to encourage the participation of NGOs and private agencies in the sector.
NEWS BRIEFS

SPREADING THE WORD

With a view to taking policy reforms from the concept stage at the Centre to the ground level in the States, the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission (RGNNDWM) will conduct regional workshops across the country. These will help in finalising a National Action Plan for institutionalising community participation, capital cost sharing, user based operation and maintenance and surveillance in the RWSS sector.

The first series of workshops were held for the north-central region in Jaipur in September this year. The next will be held on October 26 and 27 in Bangalore for seven southern States. These are Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Goa and Lakshadweep. A workshop in Chandigarh on November 5 and 6 will follow for the four northern States of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana. On November 18 and 19 there will be a workshop in Guwahati for the north-eastern States and Sikkim. Finally, in the second week of December, there will be a workshop in Bhubaneswar for the eastern States.

JOINT INITIATIVE

The Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission, in partnership with RWSG-SA and the Ramakrishna Mission (a well known NGO), has decided to invest Rs 50 lakhs ($ 119,000) in a pilot rural water supply scheme in Bengal. The unique feature of the project is that the community will contribute as much as one third of the capital cost of water supply, as well as 100 per cent of the operation and maintenance cost. The project, which will be implemented in a participatory manner, will also seek to mitigate the arsenic problem in the affected villages.

RWSG-SA is providing technical assistance to the NGO communities and will also help in building knowledge across the region by developing a linkage between this project and the Bangladesh Arsenic Mitigation Project.

RURAL WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION POLICY REFORM WORKSHOP

A National Workshop for Ministers jointly organised by Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission, Economic Development Institute (World Bank) and RWSG-SA.


Bangalore, India

NOTICE BOARD

NEW APPROACH TO SANITATION FOR HIGH RISK COMMUNITIES

An International Workshop organised by the World Health Organisation (SEARO).

November 17 to 19, 1998.

Pokhara, Nepal

Welcome to Jalvaani, a newsletter for rural water supply and environmental sanitation (RWSS). In some ways Jalvaani is not really new but a transmuted version of Mission Watsan, a journal of the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission (RGNNDWM). In these days of partnerships and strategic alliances which build on the experiences and strengths of complementing agencies, the recent agreement signed between the RGNNDWM and the UNDP-World Bank Water and Sanitation Program (Regional Water and Sanitation Group - South Asia), provides the backdrop for the relaunch of the newsletter.

This newsletter is meant to cater to important stakeholders in the RWSS sector, including Governments (both Central and State), NGOs, the private sector and international support agencies. Our attempt is to capture and highlight the innovations and best practices taking place all over, which do not quality as news for the mainstream media. Through this, we hope to tell you about interesting projects like the one detailed in our lead story. It is about the traditional technique of storytelling being applied to communicate the message of a new approach in the RWSS sector.

We have divided the newsletter in clearly defined but not rigid sections. There is space for newsbriefs pointing to important events in the sector, as well as interesting technological developments. A notice board will carry announcements of forthcoming conferences, seminars and workshops, etc.

In the NGO section, we show how sustained work in watershed development led not only to adequate drinking and irrigation water for villagers in the arid region of Rajasthan, but also to the revival of a river that had been dry for years. The funding agencies section carries information on UNICEF's school sanitation project in Haryana and Department for International Development's work in Maharashtra.

Finally, on the backpage, we carry an interview with Dr N.C. Saxena, Secretary, Rural Development in the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment. In future issues, we will talk to other stakeholders in the sector, including community leaders. We hope you find our efforts both informative and a refreshing change from the stream of typically 'official' newsletters. It is our endeavour to make this forum as interactive and contributory as possible.

I wish you all a Happy Diwali.

Palat Mohandas
Joint Secretary and Mission Director
Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission
Government of India
In the harsh, low rainfall, arid slopes of the Aravalli hills of Rajasthan, a minor conservation miracle has occurred. Aravari River, which had been completely dry for many years has come back to life through the concerted efforts of villagers, assisted by a local voluntary group, Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS). The movement is really a decade old, though the river has only recently come back to life.

It is a story of perseverance, of attempts by villagers to improve their livelihood and living conditions and, in doing so, aiding the rebirth of a river in this unforgiving climate. In Hamirpur village, upstream of the river, where the villagers and TBS have constructed the 50 feet wide and 11 feet high Jabar Sagar Dam, there is water all the year round and birds have started flocking to the area.

"Frankly we had no idea that we would revivise such a big river when we began work in the villages of the region," admitted Rajendra Singh of TBS rather candidly. "All we wanted to do was to work on reviving traditional water bodies of the villages called ‘johads’ as well as protect the trees, forests and wildlife of the region."

TBS started work in this region over a decade ago and its efforts have borne fruit. Unlike the Government programmes, their strategy was quite clear: villagers had to be stakeholders in whatever activity was undertaken. This method helped ensure both community ownership and long term sustainability.

Residents of Hamirpur paid nearly a fourth of the cost of the dam besides contributing their labour. The dam is not the only activity undertaken by the villagers in this region. They have built and repaired nearly 1500 water structures in this region, of which nearly 200 are in the catchment of Aravari alone.

When water began gushing in small streams along the course of the Aravari some time ago, it became clear to the people that a major event was happening. Singh said it was fortuitous that they began work from the upstream region of the river where percolation from the johads brought water back in the wells. The excess water flowed downstream into the channels and streams which merged to become the river.

TBS also simultaneously emphasised that though the water works were important, the villagers had to promise to help revive and protect the forests of the region. TBS explained to the villagers that if there were no forests the rain would wash away the topsoil from their fields and damage the water bodies that the villagers were building. Trees would also help in trapping the rainwater that would percolate into the ground and recharge their wells and later, revive the river.

The villagers readily agreed and evolved their own rules regarding protection of not only the village common lands and trees but also the barren lands classified as “forests” under the control of the forest department. Fines were instituted for those found so much as carrying an axe in their “protected areas”.

Villagers claim that things have improved to such an extent that people who had earlier migrated to live in the slums of Delhi and Ahmedabad are returning. According to them, even the river has come alive with fish that are two feet in length and weigh up to 10 kg.
KARNATAKA Rural Water and Sanitation

Community ownership

A village takes over the running of its own water and sanitation project, heralding a new era of decentralised management

Holalu, a hitherto nondescript village of Mandya district in Karnataka hit the headlines recently when it became the first village to take over the management of a water and environmental sanitation project completed under a World Bank assisted project. True to its name (Holalu means echo), the village reverberates with deep sounds of hope and progress showing the path for others to follow. The unanimous demand of the people was that the project be managed by them: "We are waiting to take over the water and sanitation system for operation and maintenance as we are enjoying the sweet, safe and sufficient water gushing out of our taps", said the villagers with much enthusiasm.

Project assets worth Rs 23 lakhs were handed over to Thotiah, chairman of the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC). It was done in the presence of Chowdiah, Member of Legislative Council, K Namboodri of the NGO Vikasana, and, most importantly, the systems could be maintained to the full satisfaction of the villagers. Village personnel for maintaining the system have already been trained under the project and have been appointed by the VWSC. Today, Holalu is a good example of community based management of water supply and sanitation systems.

WEST BENGAL Rural Sanitation

Demand Responsive Approach

Building on the success of the Midnapur self help sanitation experiment in 1990, the West Bengal Government has launched an ambitious scheme to replicate the programme in all parts of the State. Starting in right earnest in 1993-94 by identifying zilla parishads as organisations to set up sanitary marts in each panchayat samiti, by May 1998 work had spread to 193 of the 341 panchayat samitis. In order to make it different from other Government run schemes, the issue of "self-sustainability of the programme" has been uppermost in the State Government's mind. In a break from past practice, no Government subsidies are given. Instead, the Government has stressed the need to make the rural community aware of the need for sanitation, resulting in creating demand. Dr Surya Kant Misra, Panchayat and Rural Development Minister, admits that "all previous attempts of the Government to provide sanitary facilities with high doses of subsidy more or less failed as it generated a subsidy dependence syndrome, which is counter productive in the long run".

"If the Government's aim of reaching 90 lakh rural families was to be achieved with even a moderate subsidy of Rs 1000 per latrine, it would have meant an outgo of Rs 900 crores. It was considered impossible to mobilise such huge funds. Besides, the literacy and land reform movements in the state had shown that the rural people were capable of mobilising community resources on their own", said the Minister.

People's participation is the cornerstone of this project in which youth organisations and local NGOs were invited to form sanitary marts. In addition, schoolteachers and members of all political parties were involved in the programme. Affordable technology, with models costing between Rs 340 to Rs 3,500, also ensured its rapid spread.

The project has evolved a methodology whereby an initial small fee for the motivator who brings the community together is built into the construction cost of the latrine. In addition, costs for two mart managers are factored in for O&M.

As a result of the programme, there has been a dramatic change in the lives of the rural population. A study by the Sanitation Cell of Panchayats and Rural Development in Tamluk II Block of Midnapur district between 1994 and 1996, shows that incidence of disease has reduced significantly. Diarrhoecal episodes are down from 890 to 490 over this period.
UNICEF initiates an environmental sanitation programme in 400 primary schools in Ambala district of Haryana.

Given the poor state of sanitation in the country, with less than one fifth of rural households actually having latrines, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has undertaken an ambitious project to inculcate the hygiene and cleanliness habit in the young.

Incorporating the new thinking on sanitation, which goes beyond the simple provision of latrines to include a package of health related measures, it was felt that the best target group would be primary school children who had not yet settled into set behavioural patterns. The project covers aspects of environmental and household cleanliness, as well as personal hygiene. It is an acknowledged fact that health education, leading to an understanding of the linkages between health and sanitation, is fundamental to attainment of such a change.

Children are far more receptive to new ideas and are at an age when they can be influenced to cultivate the habits of good personal hygiene. The promotion of personal hygiene and environmental sanitation within schools can help children adopt good habits during the formative years of their childhood. Besides, to get the programme going, the rural school system offers a vast infrastructure which can be used to exert influence, not just on the children but also on the community at large. The entire programme covers seven components which include handling of drinking water, disposal of waste water, disposal of human excreta, disposal of garbage and animal excreta, home sanitation and food hygiene, personal hygiene and finally, village sanitation.

A study of the project points to significant success in implementation. Teachers reported that, following their discussions and activities with the children, the schools were able to present a cleaner look, the children were neatly dressed and most wore footwear, and most importantly, they understood the linkage between health and sanitation. They also started interacting with the larger village community about the poor sanitary conditions of the village and ways to improve it. Children discussed components of sanitation in their respective homes as a result of which parents also started becoming aware. As part of the larger outreach, the teachers also visit their pupils’ homes once a week and they have found that attitudes are changing.

On the flip side is the perennial lack of funds to construct latrines and storage tanks. Besides the lack of coordination among the various Government departments, which should be responsible for the programme, the lack of interest in the larger community is the biggest obstacle.

Be that as it may, as long as children are getting involved in improved sanitation and learning that keeping themselves and their surroundings clean will lead to a disease free tomorrow, the larger battle is being won.

DFID in Maharashtra

In a major transition from their past practices brought about by extensive experience in the rural water supply and sanitation project in Maharashtra, the Department for International Development (DFID) and the State Government have agreed to policy changes for better integration of water supply and sanitation projects.

Future projects would be undertaken by a community-based, demand led process, emphasising the recognition of water as a social and economic good.

The other key elements of this understanding between the two parties include development of least cost solutions as well as development of institutional and social mechanisms for the rational allocation of water between competing sources of demand.

DFID has been supporting a rural water supply and sanitation project in Maharashtra since April 1990. The project was designed to supply piped and treated water to 186 villages and one small town in Jalgaon and Nasik districts.

Work on one of the two schemes in Jalgaon district was completed early this year while work on the other is nearing completion. Construction of the scheme in Nasik district has also been substantially completed but a number of villages are yet to start receiving their full requirement of water.

One of the innovations in the project has been the establishment of professional units in the zilla parishad charged with the responsibility of operations, maintenance and cost recovery of the schemes.

Building the capacity of the community for management of village distribution systems, helping women to take on a greater decision-making role and ensuring that benefits reach people of scheduled castes and tribes residing in the area are other important elements of DFID's work in this central region of Maharashtra.
Filling the information gap

Documentation centre at the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission to fill in a vital resource gap

Speedy and reliable information in the hands of key stakeholders in the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) sector such as Government, NGOs and the communities at large is a vital asset for effective implementation of schemes and delivery of services. In order to fulfil this indispensable need, the RGNDWM recently set up a Documentation and Information Centre (INSDOC) in collaboration with the Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre.

Providing sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a global problem that is acute in many developing and underdeveloped countries. The problem is being addressed by various national and international agencies. Information is generated in the form of reports, books, research and technical articles, electronic databases, etc. To facilitate access to this, the INSDOC Centre has been constituted in the RWSS sector to the States. Besides, a number of research and development activities have been initiated by the mission and are being carried out by universities, research institutions, government bodies and NGOs. These have generated a lot of valuable data and information which will be disseminated through INSDOC.

Inaugurated in July 1998 by the Minister of State for Rural Areas and Employment, Mr Babagouda Patil, INSDOC consists of a fully automated library and an electronic information centre which house a rich collection of literature on drinking water and sanitation in the form of books, reports, journals and electronic databases. The centre also has facilities to access the Internet and ultimately, the centre’s resources, through its own website, will be open to global access. Information products are also planned on compact discs.

Dry composting Latrine

The Programme for Community Organisation and Shri Char Shakti have come up with a dry composting latrine design which might well be the sanitation solution for waterlogged and high water table areas like the coastal zones of the country. The two Thiruvananthapuram based organisations along with a British engineer, Paul Calvert, have devised this low water usage system which is cheap as well as hygienic. It is not only clean in itself, but also prevents the contamination of village water sources like wells through seepage which is common in the case of septic tanks and pit latrines.

The dry latrine consists of two covered chambers each with a urine and defecation hole. Each of these chambers is used in turn for six months a year. Besides these, there is a wash hole and a flowerbed into which the wastewater and urine flow. The urine gets diluted by the wastewater and acts as a fertiliser while neutralising the smell.

The faeces hole has a bed of straw at the bottom into which it falls. Instead of flushing, a little lime or cooking ash is sprinkled over the hole and the cover replaced. At the end of the year, before returning to the first chamber, it is opened and cleaned out. "The contents are transformed to an earthy garden soil like compost with no objectionable smell or appearance", claims the group. This can be used as organic fertilizer in the fields or around trees.

The organisation says that the individual system’s average cost is about Rs 3,500 and it consumes ten times less water than flush closet toilets. It has the added advantage of providing a source for organic fertilizer as well as safeguarding against contamination of drinking water sources.

For more information, contact: Programme for Community Organisation and Shri Char Shakti at P.O. Box, Spencer Junction, M.G. Road, Thiruvananthapuram 695039.
Government as a facilitator

moving from that of a provider to a facilitator?

Government can become a pure facilitator only when it reduces subsidy. While we want to move in that direction, water is still a highly subsidised commodity. If you want more of private sector investment, you must show them some profits. This may take some time. Alternatively, government investment could continue but be channelised through the panchayats, user groups and other bodies. Government could therefore provide the funds, but actual service delivery would be through other local agencies. In the short and intermediate term, it would be more practical to adopt this as the institutional model.

in view of the policy reforms Government is advocating, what should happen to the Public Health and Engineering Departments (PHEDs), which are in charge of the rural water supply sector?

Their problems are mainly overstaffing, high overheads, corruption, politicisation and very inflexible technology. They also have few new ideas and lack the willingness to experiment. Governments change and Departments change only when they are forced to change; they don’t change on their own. Gradually, we’ll have to see that central funding is linked with suitable institutional reforms in the state PHEDs, after sector studies. For example, as an incentive, the Centre could consider giving additional funds to state PHEDs, which reduce staff and overhead costs, etc.

What is the Government doing to involve more women in this sector?

This is a major issue. We already have one third panchayats headed by women. We need to encourage and get them more actively involved in the RWSS sector in areas like repair of handpumps, etc. Women can also play an important role in sanitation programmes and in extension work. Maybe anganwadi workers and other local women can be encouraged in the RWSS sector. I think we have to make special efforts to promote the role of women in this sector.

Finally, any thoughts on the forthcoming newsletter? What do you think about this joint initiative of the Rajiv Gandhi Mission, RWSS-SA and the UN System?

I think it is a very good initiative. It is a useful way of sharing best practices, innovations and new thinking in the RWSS sector. You must circulate it to as many stakeholders as possible, especially the engineers in State Governments. Please put as many persons as possible on your mailing list. Ultimately, the success of your newsletter will depend on the number of letters, responses and contributions you get.