

Sustainable Conservation of Water Environment Through Community Driven Sanitation Campaign: A Case Study of South Tripura District

Pravin Agrawal IFS

Lecturer, State Forest Service College
Ministry of Environment and Forest
P.O New Forest, Dehradun, 248006, Uttaranchal, India
Corresponding email: mt077@ifs.nic.in

Introduction:

As per National Sample Survey on drinking water and sanitation in India, it is estimated that around 76% of rural households are dependent on underground source of water like wells, tube wells, or hand pumps, whereas about 31% of house holds have the same within their own premises. Same survey also highlights that even today only 17.5% of rural population are using Latrines, whereas others still prefer open defecation in their adjoining areas. (*10th Five year Plan, GOI, 2002*) This open defecation is one of the major reasons of water pollution and water bourn diseases. It is estimated that 70% water available is polluted and estimated 3 million work days are lost due to water related diseases. This scenario is true for most of the South Asian countries. However, our experience states that, whenever focused attention has been made morbidity and mortality due to killer diseases like cholera, diarrhea etc declined. (*MORD, GOI, 2001*) Total Sanitation campaign (TSC) is one of such focused, community led and people centered programme launched by Government of India in 1999. The focus of this programme is to improve the water environment regime of rural India.

Being a Government sponsored programme, it had the same fate as other Rural Development (RD) programme had, in most of the districts of the country. Some or other lacunas in the programme itself are generally being cited as reason for non implementation of these programmes. However, this was not the case with South Tripura district, of India as far as TSC is concerned. In this district, this programme has been considered as consecrated and as an opportunity to rise on the ladder of development. It is not the case that people of South Tripura District or for that matter people's representative, Government servants of this district are different compare to other district. They are same, but it is the team work of all stakeholders, who have put forward various innovative participatory techniques to make it understand the importance of sanitation and converted this government's programme into community activity for the cause of improving water environment in the district.

Genesis of the Community Activities:

This programme was launched in South Tripura district in August 2002. District Magistrate and Project Director, District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) had prepared the detail plan of action as per programme guidelines. This plan of action was subsequently explained to public representatives, officers of line departments, NGOs, Clubs, Self Help Group (SHG) promoting Institutions etc. As such, all those who can influence community were taken into confidence. Being a like minded team of Government officers, representatives of line departments ensured all possible help for successful completion of campaign. Arrangement of

Fund was done from said scheme and it was decided to pool some more fund from other RD schemes being implemented in the district.

To start with, Initial baseline survey was conducted to know exact ground situation about sanitation. It was found that in entire district, 1,03,273 Below Poverty line (BPL) families, 44,116 Above Poverty line (APL) families, 597 Schools and 549 preschool do not have latrines and required to be taken under project. (TSC South Tripura, 2003) Subsequently various innovative participatory techniques were used to know peoples reaction and their willingness to accept and participate voluntarily in the programme. These techniques were also found to be useful in knowing probable section of community, which might oppose the programme and probable problems with technology and availability of raw material like cement and iron rods. In addition, through this participation, forward and backward linkages were also established like availability of fund, skilled masons, availability of water for continuous use of latrines especially in hilly areas and so on. Some of participatory techniques used during this exercise were Open House, Search Conference, Consensus Conference, Public Hearing and so on. Separate strategies were adopted for participation of Tribal population. These participation techniques ensured community participation and in turn sustainability of the entire programme.

After getting communities feedback, integrated public campaigns were launched covering sanitation, hygiene, health, environment, women empowerment and so on. Various campaign modes like slogans, scripts, debate, lectures, pamphlets, handbills, calendars, stickers, media advertisement, and hoardings in offices/ markets/ bus stands had been deployed throughout the district. To intensify community involvement, video films were prepared in vernacular languages and cultural campaigns in the form of street show were arranged in all villages of the district. Various cultural competitions like poetry, songs, drama, skit, play etc were organized at various levels, which had sanitation as main messages. Workshops were organized at district and sub divisional level for these cultural teams, as they were the main carrier of message of programme to grass root level worker and community as whole. Because of all these publicity efforts, sanitation campaign was able to reach to each and every individual of the district.



Campaigning for sanitation through Street Play

While everyone was busy with campaigning, administration was busy with administrative preparation for successful implementation of campaign by way of arranging fund, work force, and materials. To start with, some officers of Public Works Department (PWD), Block Development Officers (BDO), and DRDA were sent to West Bengal to study various technology options available for construction of squatting plates, pans etc. Subsequently, considering all factors, various models of latrines to be constructed were finalized. These



Various models of latrines under TSC

models were suggested depending upon location, cost, availability of water, number of family members and so on. Workshops were conducted for local masons for quality and cost efficiency. Local community groups like NGOs, SHG's, Local clubs etc were also trained for construction of sanitary marts in large scale. With this middle man were eliminated and community started feeling the ownership of entire sanitation programme.

One of the important features of TSC was school sanitation. For this, special trainings were arranged for key resource persons of the district. These resource persons were then sent to various Blocks to train various teachers of that block. Special teaching handbook was developed explaining the importance of sanitation. Schools were requested to have daily discussion on sanitation for about five minutes after Morning Prayer. School level quiz, slogan, and essay writing competition were arranged on sanitation. All these helped in substantial community action as children discussed this sanitation matter with their parents, which ensured their participation in the program, for the construction of latrine in their households.



Discussion on importance of sanitation in school

To boost the community activity, Government had introduced various prizes amounts for 100% sanitized village, block and district. The area is considered 100% sanitized, only when there is no evidence of open defecation in that area. To monitor the progress of implementation of campaign, various committees were formed at District, Block, Sector, Gram Panchayat, village, and at ward level. These committees were asked to meet every week and progress of construction of Latrines by BPL families and APL families of their jurisdiction were reported and passed on to higher level committee i.e. from lowest ward level committee to Highest District level.

Activity Description:

With this background support actual implementation of programme started. At the outset, two SHG per Panchayat had been asked to construct squatting plates as per baseline survey required in that particular Panchayat and hand over the same to the Panchayat Secretary (PS). Then every BPL family had been asked to dig up a hole as per standard design and construct the super structure on the same by any means as per their ability. Once they complete it, they have to report it to PS and take one squatting plate from him. This squatting plate is a subsidy from government to BPL Family only. This squatting plate was



Rural Sanitary Mart: Squatting plates



Family latrine constructed under TSC

then placed and fixed on the hole they had dug. Once this is finished, said family has to start using latrines and no trace of open defecation should be reported from their premises or from adjoining area. APL families were requested to construct their own latrines. PWD and DRDA were given the responsibility of construction of school latrines for all the schools of the district depending upon availability of fund.

As it happens in all such work, there were some families, which were not ready to agree to dig up the hole or construct superstructure. Some APL families started demanding sanitary mart as subsidy. Some families, even after construction of latrines, still hesitated using the same and continued open defecation. All such issues were discussed and necessary course of action like community or administrative intervention required, were decided in various meetings. In most of such situations, local community rose up and took the entire responsibility to pursue all such unwilling families and compelled them to become part of TSC.

Analysis:

Because of all these community efforts backed by administrative support, today South Tripura district is on the verge of being declared as 100% sanitized District. The Agricultural Finance Corporation Ltd, New Delhi has conducted the mid term Evaluation of TSC and rated the district on various 28 indicators and found that South Tripura District topped the ranking with excellent policy and administrative support at State level, comfortable levels of financial support, excellent motivation community participation, and almost in every other aspect. (AFCL, 2005) After achieving this distinction, some obvious question arises as

- Is this the end of sanitation or still there is a scope for improvement?
- Whether latrines constructed are permanent and what will happen after these latrine become useless?
- Whether there is any visible impact on conservation of Water Environment? If so, is it sustainable”

In fact, these questions are difficult to answer at this stage as entire programme has just been completed and it may take another 1-2 years to notice its impact. However, it was reported by Chief Medical Officer of South Tripura District that in villages and blocks, which were first to complete total sanitation, percentage of Water Borne diseases has reduced by more than 80%. It was also reported that there was drastic reduction of Infant Mortality Rate from about 32 to 12 per 1000 in last one year and no Maternal Mortality reported in some of the completely sanitized village. With this campaign, pregnant ladies are the most beneficial group followed by children who got their playing field back for play and overall village environment has become clean and fresh.

Conclusion:

This is the fact that latrines constructed are very temporary in nature and just having latrines in every household is not the end of sanitation as such. One of the major aims of this programme is to develop the habit of avoiding open defecation. Once it is achieved, it was expected that surrounding water environment will get conserve and in turn, health condition of rural village population especially of women and children will improve. It is also expected that whenever latrines of any family become useless the concerned family will construct their own latrines without government help as a part of their family duty as they do for maintenance of their houses. As such, we can safely conclude that we have achieved the sustainability of conservation of water environment through sanitation.

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