



Lessons from Nepal's sanitation social movement

“SANITATION FOR ALL: ALL FOR SANITATION”

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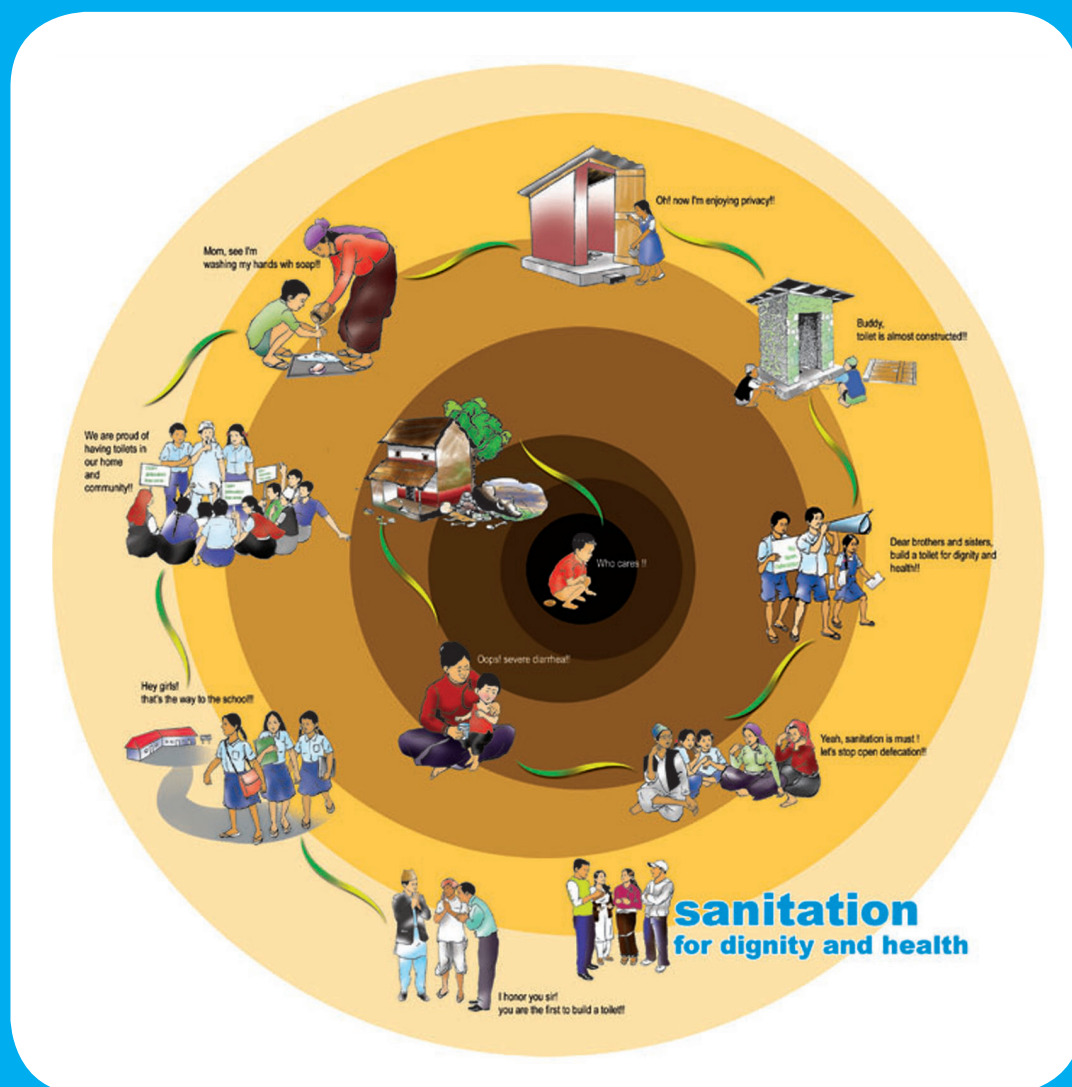
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This brief case study was carried out by UNICEF to help capture the lessons from Nepal's growing social movement for sanitation, probing how the major changes came about at local level and in the sector as a whole. It draws from information documentary review as well as key informant interviews at national, district and village levels.¹ It is intended to consolidate and share learning across the sector as well as to other sectors grappling with social mobilization challenges.

“Sanitation for All: All for Sanitation”

Celebrating change



By mid-2014, 15 districts have been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF). Another 18 municipalities, 1600 Village Development Committees and over 3300 school catchment areas have also been declared ODF and 10 more districts are well on their way. This means that 6.9 million people, nearly one-quarter of the population of Nepal, is now living in ODF declared districts and VDCs where every household and every government facility has a toilet.* This is the beginning of a movement for change in Nepal which has already started to improve the health and nutrition of the population.

The change happening is supported by the highest levels of leadership with the President having launched the National Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan in 2011; with the engagement of the then ministries of Physical Planning and Works; Local Development; Education and Sports; Health and Population; Finance; and Children, Women and Social Welfare, and the National Planning Commission, as well as the support of a cross-section of political leaders and international actors. The plan brings together all the key stakeholders under one harmonized approach. Building on the Master Plan, the government of Nepal selected sanitation as the focus for the UNDP-supported Millennium Declaration Goal Acceleration Framework process and, in January 2013, the Prime Minister launched the Nepal MAF Report – Improving Access to Sanitation, tasking five concerned ministries to take specific actions.

Nepal is pushing hard towards 100 percent sanitation coverage by 2017. Central Bureau of Statistics' data from 2011 indicates total sanitation coverage estimated at 62 percent, already reaching the national target for 2013 and surpassing the Millennium Development Goal of 52 percent coverage 2 years early.

* 27 key informant interviews were carried out, 16 at district and village level, as well as 4 group interviews with child club members and 2 with district level organizations.

Why is this significant?

Only 5 years ago, in 2009, Nepal was stunned by the spread and impact of a diarrhoeal disease epidemic. There are diarrhoea outbreaks every year in Nepal, but this time more than 70,000 people in 27 of Nepal's 75 districts were affected. Two-thirds of deaths reported occurred in Mid- and Far-West Development Regions, where 371 people died. The WASH cluster, led by UNICEF and co-led by the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works, and bringing together many humanitarian NGO partners (National Red Cross Society, Save the Children, Oxfam, WHO, UNDP, private sectors and International Relief and Development), were galvanized to provide an emergency preventative and life-saving response including house-to-house campaigns to control the situation. However, the underlying cause was a severe gap in the national development gains. WASH Cluster was working with Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) and health cluster in a coordinated fashion in all affected districts. More importantly, the change is happening because of the power and willingness of the people themselves for change.

At the time, national sanitation coverage was little over 40 percent, well below coverage figures for access to water, and even this low figure masked disparities between urban and rural Nepal and across districts. In the Mid- and Far-West Development Regions where the diarrhoeal disease epidemic had struck hardest, nearly two-thirds of the population were practicing open defecation. Even among the higher income households, having no latrines was not uncommon – one-in-five of people in the highest income quintile still practiced open defecation as did nearly one-half of the population in the 2nd highest income quintile. There was, and for many Nepalese still is, a widespread social acceptance that practicing open defecation is normal.

Water and sanitation trends and targets

** Figure in percentage*

Location	1990	2000	2005	2010	2011	2015 MDG target
Sanitation						
Urban	34	80	81	78	88	67
Rural	3	25	30	37	50	52
National	6	30	39	43	62	53
Drinking water						
Urban	90	86	93	94	94	95
Rural	43	71	79	78	88	72
National	46	73	81	80	89	73

Figure in parentheses includes shared latrines

Source: adapted from MDG Progress Report, 2010, NPC; NDHS 2011; administrative figures suggest 2011 coverage for sanitation is even higher at 62 percent (National Planning Commission, "Nepal MDG Acceleration Framework - Improving Access to Sanitation" (Kathmandu: 2013).



Latrines were looked upon as smelly and unclean as compared to open defecation in grasses or bushes. Building and using a latrine was viewed as breaking with what had always been done. And even today, despite the progress in national sanitation coverage, there are still 6 districts in eastern and central *Teraï* with dense population and sanitation coverage below 30 percent.²

The consequences go beyond sanitation, hygiene and health. Nearly three-quarters of schools had no latrines at all in 2009³ and fewer still had appropriately designed separate latrines for girls and boys. Not surprisingly, adolescent girls frequently reported not attending school during menstruation because of lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities. And yet, there was little awareness of this impact among teachers, School Management Committee and Parent Teacher's Association.

Many working in the sector have highlighted that this situation existed despite the fact that there were many organizations working diligently in the sector for many years. International organizations and donors, as well as ministries of Physical Planning and Works; Local Development; Education and Sports were all active in supporting improved sanitation using a wide range of approaches. However, there was at the time little coordination across the sector and little convergence and synergy across the wide diversity of approaches. On a more positive note, those involved at the time were gaining important experience and learning, building elements of the collaborative effort and momentum of a movement but in localized areas. Many of the vital elements of the ODF movement of today are built on these early lessons. The 2009 diarrhoeal disease epidemic was a tragedy, but also an important catalyst for pulling together the best of localized experiences and dramatically scaling up efforts to address the sanitation gap through a social movement.



The story of people changing

The most impressive change taking place is of course the change by people, individuals who are investing their resources in building a latrine for their family, and the community around them that makes this change a collective responsibility. Interviews with leaders and activists in the sanitation movement probing *how* the change happened, what made people change and what didn't, consistently highlight some of the same conclusions.



No single ingredient, no single recipe

One of the common themes is that there are 'no recipes'. Rather many simultaneous approaches are needed. Kamal Adhikari, currently working as a sociologist in DWSS, reflects that "getting people to change is more art than science" and it is more a process of helping people to "open the inner eye". "We use all mantra, all techniques" emphasizes UNICEF's Sanitation and Hygiene Specialist, Namaste Lal Shrestha.

Interviews at all levels of Nepal make it clear that triggers for change at the individual level are multiple and inter-linked, and are supported by changes at community, village and district levels as well as nationally and at sector level. The story of change is complex as outlined in the sections that follow.

No more subsidies

One of the strongest lessons and messages from people working in the sector is that subsidies don't work. As in many other countries, both the government and international organizations in Nepal have experimented with subsidies in the past, in Nepal since the 1980s. And while many organizations and institutions had been involved in giving subsidies, differently in different locations, they have come around to a common understanding, first in the early districts where ODF was promoted and then more widely under the common Master Plan. Most international and national level stakeholders recognized that if 100 percent sanitation coverage was to be achieved nationally, the subsidy model was simply not affordable. Furthermore, the limited results spoke for themselves – little progress in sanitation coverage had been achieved over those years of using subsidies. Many also see subsidies as having created a very negative 'dependency' syndrome. Leaders and activists for the ODF movement in the villages and districts share stories with humour but also some frustration about latrines that were built, but never used. One child club member from Achham relates a statement by a member of his community: "They gave me money to build it (the latrine), but where is the money to make me use it." Many suggest that the subsidies were also not reaching the poorest. However, the challenge remains in many districts and villages that people expect the subsidies and so a first step in any ODF effort has been to clarify that this will not be the case. Ruling out subsidies has not meant that there is no assistance to the poorest of the poor, discussed further below.

Triggering through dignity, pride and prestige

What has worked in Nepal is the “triggering” approach common to the global community-based Total Sanitation movement in other countries. The starting point that has proven so effective is to discuss, map and visualize what is happening in the community in terms of sanitation, giving powerful images of how faecal matter is carried from defecation areas to food and water, and stimulating reactions of disgust and shame as people understand and visualize the effects of open defecation for everyone in the community. This visualization provides a new perspective and this is usually a strong motivation to change.

In addition, the themes of dignity, pride and prestige have been highlighted as crucial in triggering by leaders in Kathmandu as well as facilitators and children in the districts – this is again consistent with the experience globally with community-based Total Sanitation strategies. There are many variations on the theme but a common thread is the appeal to people’s pride.

The previous Joint Secretary for the Ministry of Urban Development, Abadh Kishore Mishra, tells of asking district staff in Pyuthan to do a quick survey back when he was Regional Director for Mid-West Development Region Monitoring and Supervision Office for the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage; he wanted to explore how many people owned a telephone, a television and a toilet in their house. The stark finding was that owning a telephone and a television was consistently more common than owning a toilet. And so the challenge in getting people to ‘build’ a toilet, was more about convincing people that they want and need a toilet, making it prestigious to have one, a necessary part of having a house.



The range of approaches to talking about dignity and pride at village level discussions have included discussions about Nepal’s proud peacekeepers who were said to so unfortunately carried cholera to Haiti; about the differences in sanitation practices that migrant workers find when they travel out of Nepal and the desire to bring some of those amenities back to their homes in Nepal; about the indignity of Nepali’s being arrested in other countries for public urination; and closer to home, about the indignity especially for women forced to bare themselves where anyone can see them as they defecate. All of these images bring a different perspective on the current practices of open defecation and a combination of shame and pride to drive the change.

This is a departure from years of focusing on talking to people about the health risks of not having toilets, which is not enough on its own to make people change. While understanding the health risks is still important, especially when trying to convince people in the district development committees and staff in other sectors, dignity and pride have proven to be a powerful extra push that seems necessary to drive individual and collective change.

Schools mobilizing for change

Schools have also been recognized as an important place to start the change. This builds on the approach of School Led Total Sanitation (SLTS) introduced first in Nepal in 2006, where triggering starts with the teachers and children and moves out into the catchment area, community and VDC. As of 2013 there were over 3300 ODF schools and their catchment areas supporting the wider ODF movement.

Schools are important in part because teachers are often well respected in the community and so become influential mobilizers themselves. Many teachers have become volunteer sanitation facilitators.

Teachers and children together start the process of establishing new rules and norms around use and maintenance of toilets within the school. Schools have been important especially in challenging social barriers that prevent disadvantaged ethnic and caste groups and girls from access to sanitation. Children have proven to be quick adapters, ready to absorb different ways of thinking and adopt changes themselves.

Children can also be skilful advocates with their parents and within the community. They are often great innovators, thinking of different ways to convince people in the community to change. One child recounts that on realizing that some older people didn't know



Children challenging chhaupadi

Three boys and one girl, all teenagers, from child clubs in an ODF declared district sit side by side answering questions about what has worked and not worked in the movement for ODF in their communities. One of the boys is the first to mention the problem of chhaupadi, a traditional practice which requires girls and women to stay separate from the rest of their family and the community during menstruation. Because of this, where chhapuadi is practiced, girls and women are not allowed to use the family toilet during this time. "Our culture has not changed so much. Our sisters and mothers cannot join in the ODF [change]. We need to make people aware that women should be able to use the toilet all the time" proposes one boy. The girl sitting next to him goes further, "If women cannot use the toilets all the time, we should not declare [a village or district] ODF." These children have a fierce determination to bring about change in sanitation and it seems they have a natural concern also for equity. This push for change may be critical in achieving and sustaining total coverage of ODF for all and pushing the post-ODF agenda.

how to use the toilet, they enlisted little children to show how it is done. Child club members are quick to tell of the different arguments they have made to wealthy community members, teachers, older people, any who have initially resisted building a toilet, creatively playing on different angles of dignity and pride.

Many voices; many approaches

Still, as child club members from different districts have highlighted, some individuals will not listen to children; the lesson many share is that different voices are needed to reach different people.

In some districts, the Local Development Officer has written to all district employees calling on their personal and professional pride, asking them to report on whether they have a latrine for their own home. One District WASH Committee wrote personal greeting cards to those households who had not yet made the change, and Village Development Committee Chairpersons made personal visits to homes. This kind of personal attention appears to work for some individuals, making them feel more responsible for how their actions affect others. Sometimes people reject the voices from within the community, and in such cases, NGOs have played an important role in bringing an outside perspective.

Local media with public service announcements, as well as songs and street theatre have also been important in creating the image of status around having a latrine; for example, a twist on the popular traditional songs, *dohori*, which carry a dialogue between a girl and a boy, with the girl giving the message that she will only marry into a house with a latrine. The media have also been powerful in playing up the sense of a common communal objective, announcing the count down until ODF is declared.

Social pressure and community ownership

Where other approaches fail, the element of social pressure to support a collective change is also important. Many note that sometimes older people, even those who have wealthy children resist change saying “Why do I need toilet, I am not around for long” or “I have never needed one before” but the community perspective, highlighting that the behaviour of one individual has an impact on the health of all, does help in convincing people.

The social pressure also involves naming and shaming those who are resisting change. The famous ‘whistle blowing’ tactic is frequently mentioned. Children in child clubs talk about targeting community members who refuse to build their latrines despite all efforts to convince them. The tactic involves real determination by the children, who find out where the defecation areas are and wait in hiding so they can catch the ‘offenders’ in the act and blow their whistles to draw attention to what they are doing. Child club members also talk of making announcements in public places in the village to tell everyone the names of those who have yet to build a latrine.



This sense of the broader commitment and community ownership which brings a strong social pressure is perhaps stronger because the movement for ODF in Nepal is not just about changing isolated communities. Rather it is organized through and reinforced by district and village development committees, and has gained a large profile nationally.

Villages and districts coming together for change

Village and district change is not wholly different from the change that takes place at individual level and small communities, but the additional institutional dimensions at local government level are consistently identified as key ingredients to change in Nepal.

Triggering on a bigger scale

Under Nepal's *Master Plan of Action for Sanitation and Hygiene* since 2011, triggering at district and village level is now actually the starting point and creates the driving force for the change in individuals, across wards, schools, villages and districts. It requires many of the same approaches and techniques to raise awareness and mobilize a change in attitude among district and village leaders and stakeholders around the issue of sanitation. The value-added of triggering at this level was significant, creating a far-reaching momentum.

To institutionalize this approach, the Master Plan established a newly named and empowered series of WASH Coordination Committees (WASH-CC), from Development Region, to district and village, all guided at national level by the National Sanitation and Hygiene Steering Committee and Coordination Committee (see box right).

Building on the experience in Mid- and Far-West Development Regions under an initial movement called the *Alliance for Action to Make Diarrhoea Disease History*, the District and Village WASH-CCs bring together all stakeholders, government and non-governmental, across all sectors,

Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Structures - Getting All Stakeholders on Board

Policy & common vision

National Sanitation and Hygiene Steering Committee - National Planning Commission, ministries of Physical planning and Works, Local Development; Education and Sports; Health and Population; Finance; and Children, Women and Social Welfare

Alignment & support

National Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committee - with the same participating national bodies as well as including other stakeholders

Regional WASH Coordination Committee - regional Offices (Health, Education and Forest), Chambers of Commerce and Industry, international and national development partners, associations of DDCs, Municipality and VDCs and federations of water supply and sanitation and forest users groups

District WASH CC - district officers, Health, Education and Women Development Offices, Department of Local Infrastructure, Agriculture and Roads, Municipality/ies, FNCCI, association of public and private schools, international and national development partners associations of DDCs, Municipality and VDCs and federations of water supply and sanitation and forest users groups

Joint Planning, Coordination and Action

Municipal/Village WASH CC - Health facilities, non-governmental and community-based organizations, forest user groups, development partners, WASH Users' Committee, Toile Development Organizations, Child clubs, Female Community Health Volunteers, headmasters/ principals, School Management Committee/ Parent-Teachers Association, women groups, micro credit organizations, local networks, etc.

Municipal and VDC level programmes

School and Community level programmes

creating a forum for triggering, mobilizing and coordinating among all local actors.

These structures also built on experiences with three model districts started back in 2007 (in Kaski, Tanahun and Chitwan) where similar collective momentum was created engaging all actors at local level. These were the first three districts where ODF was achieved and had built upon triggering in school catchment areas under the School-led Total Sanitation and then bridged to village and district level movement.

Regional WASH CCs are an entirely new mechanism, again building on the experience in the Mid- and Far-West and it is acknowledged that where Regional government is engaged, it has played a pivotal role in triggering districts and keeping the momentum.

Importance of getting everyone on board

One of the big realizations of the sanitation movement so far is that it is critical to get a wide range of stakeholders on board in the coordination and planning at district and at village level. As so many of the leaders of the movement say – ‘if you defecate you are a stakeholder.’ As with triggering at a community level, all of the stakeholders contribute to the analysis and understanding of the situation in their area, and the ideas and conclusions and actions come from everyone.

The distinct value of so many different players has been demonstrated time and time again. In the different districts and villages declared ODF thus far, it has not always been the same official, leader or group that took the lead as the most influential champions. In some cases, the Local Development Officer or Village Development Committee chair has been an early champion and when this happens, it makes the change process move fast and builds ownership of the District and Village Development Committees. In some cases, the school has



been a driving force, including the headmaster, teachers and child club’s WASH committee. Community forest management committees have played important roles in providing wood or funds to help construction. In some cases, the media have been an important voice towards building ownership and buy-in to the process. Especially given that local bodies in Nepal have not seen elections since 2002, involvement of all the political parties at local level has been critical, to get a united backing of the planned actions.

Engaging all stakeholders is also about being open, seeing opportunities and being able to find common purpose. The previous Joint Secretary for the Ministry of Urban Development, Abadh Kishore Mishra, recalls “they laughed at us when we suggested that the police had a role” – but it turned out that the local police were at the time trying to build up their relationship with the community, and Mr. Mishra reasoned that while talking to the community, they could also talk about the situation of water and sanitation.

Part of getting everyone involved is also a means of bringing potential ‘spoilers’ into the process; a way of dealing with ‘*khutta thanhe*’, the phenomenon of wanting to pull back anyone who is standing out. The more recognized leaders who are involved, the more there is a shared analysis, the harder it is for any one individual or group to hold back the process.

Including private sector

Similarly, private sector businesses have been engaged effectively in some districts because they both see the opportunity to build demand for their products and are willing to give something. This has included in some cases agreeing to move construction materials to more accessible locations for remote communities; agreeing to sell materials under a loan and payment plan; reducing prices on toilet cleaning products; and supporting construction of public toilets at service stations, the latter by the petroleum distribution association. In tourist regions, hoteliers have become involved in the movement as they see the value for foreign tourism. The movement has even been able to enlist private Nepali companies in developing lower cost toilet designs manufactured locally – initially with some support but very quickly driven by local producers seeing an opportunity to compete effectively with imported options for the pan and pipe.

Bridging traditional orientation of professional cadres

In all cases, the triggering at local government often requires awareness raising and change in perspectives. District and Village Development Committees and District Engineers are sometimes initially disinterested in the sanitation issue as they are more oriented to major construction projects. They are often brought on board when they grasp that declaring their area ODF is actually a high visibility and attainable objective.

Professionals in health, education and water need to see the connection between the outcomes they are working towards and sanitation, including how lack of toilets and open defecation will undermine health and school attendance and limits the value of water available. This is a powerful unifying message across the sectors.

The power of a joint plan

Establishing the role of the D-WASH-CC and V-WASH-CC in developing a joint action plan on sanitation is another important element that comes from earlier experiences. UNICEF colleagues recount that before really engaging in joint district plans, their support on sanitation was much less effective because there was no ownership and it was seen as a ‘UNICEF project’. Reinforcing local level accountability for developing a joint plan with the engagement of such a wide range of stakeholders brought a change to that. Building on the joint understanding of the problem through triggering at the level of the D- and V-WASH-CC, the joint plan cemented a shared approach. After the establishment of the Master Plan, the triggering and Joint Planning processes also helped to reinforce the common approach under the Guiding Principles and Operational Strategies of the Master Plan (see box in the next page).

Master trainers as triggers

While the ODF movement in Nepal relies on the work of a wide range of stakeholders, the sanitation facilitators and the Master Trainers who prepare them have played an essential catalyst role. The sanitation facilitators are nominated by the VDCs for training under a Master Trainer, and then work on a volunteer basis with all the village level groups and wider population, triggering and engaging them also



as activists, and convincing people, household by household to build latrines. They also help the V-WASH-CC in monitoring the effort. The V-WASH-CCs and sometime regional offices use their local resources to provide small incentives for the sanitation facilitators such as food, lodging or transport allowances. The Master Trainers working at district level and sanitation volunteers are the most critical resource for the movement as a whole. They are able to push and follow through on the joint plan with a level of support that is beyond the capacity of most district and village development committees or WASH-CCs on their own.

Celebration, recognition and competition

One of the more colourful and highly important features of the ODF movement in Nepal is the attention to pomp and ceremony, and reward with each ODF declaration. Tapping into a national culture of celebration and festivities, every VDC and DDC that is declared ODF receives great fanfare. High level officials from national government and international organizations attend; schools are let out to join in the festivities; dances and songs are performed and garlands upon garlands are distributed. It is a moment of celebration and recognition for everyone who has been involved. It feeds the collective dignity and pride around having improved sanitation. Leaders take great care in thinking up how to make each event more special and in getting influential people to attend.

Reward and celebration have become an institutionalized component of the strategy. The Master Plan even includes the provision of awards at national, regional, district and village

Master Plan Guiding Principles

- Commitment to an Open Defecation Free strategy
- Inclusion of universal access to sanitation in all water supply and sanitation projects
- Flexibility around informed technological choices
- Leadership of the local bodies with the VDC/Municipality as the smallest planning units
- Locally managed financial support mechanism
- The mandatory provision of toilets in public institutions
- Sanitation Facilities in Institutions (School)
- The mandatory provisions of sanitation facilities in new built up areas and their regular maintenance
- A focus on hand washing with soap and other behaviour development

level to individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to the ODF movement. These too feed into the excitement of the movement.

It is recognized by all involved in the sanitation movement that the celebration and reward has a spin-off effect of feeding competition, from one village to the next, and from district to neighbouring district. The national and local

media have helped by giving profile to the events. This spirit of competition infects schools and communities and helps to put pressure on those who are slow to build their latrines.



All the attention to celebration gives more energy to the movement on different levels. Making the news, it helps local leaders in neighbouring villages or districts to see that reaching ODF is attainable. It makes the ODF declaration seem more worthy and makes being seen as part of the movement or even as a champion for the movement more desirable. All the attention and celebration brings a shine to the topic of sanitation that isn't naturally there.

Leaders following leaders

The fact that national level leaders are engaged is important in mobilizing district and village level as well. The President launched the Master Plan itself, approved by Council of Ministers, in a high profile ceremony that engaged leaders across all stakeholder groups. Given the wide ranging national leaders involved, this worked to engage across political parties and sectors. Again this senior political leadership brings attention to the movement and creates a broader national ownership.

Getting this high level commitment was the result of conscious effort of individuals involved in the sector to convince and engage high profile leadership and commitment. Based on the work advanced in the regions, the tangible achievements, the powerful mobilization and the celebration, it was possible to pitch the ODF movement to high level leaders as something that was worthy and attractive to join and lead. Interviewing key individuals who were part of the process

Public pledge to reach ODF goals

At the September 2011 launch of Master Plan, the proceedings included a public oath by all present:

We, civil servants, representatives of different organizations and companies, journalists, teachers, students and stakeholders, in the presence of the honourable President, make a pledge to abide by the National Sanitation Master Plan 2068 which supports the one toilet per house campaign through social mobilization. We shall encourage and cultivate the practice of hand-washing with soap and water and Nepal shall be declared Open Defecation Free by 2017 as per the National Plan of Action.

Despite the challenging context of political transition in Nepal, the event was seen as a powerful and some say emotional moment of common cause, voice and message.

from different vantage points, it becomes clear that there is a bottom-up and top-down synergy in enlisting champions and creating momentum and it requires catalysts at different levels who want to share ownership and even give away credit and limelight. Says one interviewee: “A movement cannot be a success if you think that [it] is *my* movement. It is *our* movement.”

Leverage of local budgets

Under the National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Policy from 2004, 20 percent of all water supply project budgets should be allocated for the promotion of sanitation and hygiene. The Master Plan reinforces this allocation rule as well as accountability of the D-WASH-CC to review budget allocations. This has provided a major systematic input to the ODF movement, once D-WASH-CCs have been established and triggered. In some cases, Districts and Village Development Committees have allocated much more than 20 percent, recognizing the value of a short term boost to reach ODF declaration.

Local support to reach total coverage

Because the very nature of the ODF movement requires 100 percent coverage, attention to all households without latrines is essential, including those families and individuals that are extremely poor and households where girls and women are excluded from access to sanitation due to traditional practices of seclusion during menstruation. The ODF movement in Nepal has shown some successes in addressing these issues. There is a seemingly widespread practice across districts and villages that help is provided to the very poor.

Examples are given such as child clubs providing physical labour to help elderly women alone to construct their latrines; forest user groups providing wood; district or village funds being used to provide materials to child headed households and communities coming to solutions of allocating land to build latrines for the landless poor. In some districts a movement of “local heroes of generosity” has developed, with wealthier community members contributing money to help the poorest members; receiving in turn the honourable title of *danbir*. However, sustained change to ensure equity of access to sanitation will require continued attention especially in relation to disadvantaged ethnic and caste groups and gender.



Transforming the WASH sector and beyond

Since 2011, with the launching of the *National Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan* by the President of Nepal, the transformation of Nepal's WASH sector at national level has been secured, reinforcing advances already made in the social movement for ODF at local levels. As with the movement at local level, the sector transformation did not happen overnight and there were many factors that came together to support it.

Finding common concern - national triggering

In many ways, the diarrhoeal disease epidemic of 2009 was an important triggering point for the WASH sector as well as across sectors. The media attention to the epidemic challenged public officials, raising questions of accountability in the context of very grim reality where large numbers of children in the poorest regions were affected. It was a 'wake-up call' for many. And while different ministries, international and national organizations did have ongoing



work in sanitation and hygiene, much of it very sound, the events of the epidemic drew all concerned to look at the big picture and the urgency of the situation. It challenged health and WASH sectors most immediately, but the cross-sectoral nature of the problem became evident more broadly. Said one senior official, "I felt responsible, that I was the culprit. I was triggered." Even top leaders were affected by the sense of urgency, with the Prime Minister allocating money immediately to the construction of latrines, albeit an approach later transformed under the Master Plan.

International and national development references

National stakeholders in the sector have also highlighted the value of key international processes in bringing national attention to sanitation. SACOSAN has been a valuable forum in terms of sharing experiences in the region and providing models for how Nepal might move forward as well as creating an opportunity and impetus for national leaders to articulate and commit to forward-looking strategies. The Millennium Development Goal on the environment has created a cycle of national measurement and reporting that has helped to bring a focus on the low sanitation coverage and the persistent lag behind advances in WASH sector. The global MDG Acceleration Framework in 2012 process opened the opportunity for Nepal to increase the focus on sanitation within the MDGs. At the same time, internal to Nepal, the National Plan commits Nepal to a much more ambitious target of 100 percent coverage for improved sanitation by the year 2017.

The sanitation movement also builds on a history of milestones in Nepal's sanitation policy and public events and commitments: the Sanitation Policy of 1994; statements at the

District Development Committee Chairperson and Municipalities Conference in 1998; the launching of the Nation Sanitation Action Week and School Sanitation and Hygiene Education programme, both since 2000 and Hand-Washing with Soap Campaign started in 2004 and the School-led Total Sanitation initiated in 2006; as well as the Commitment of 601 Parliament Members during the International Year of Hygiene in 2008. All this past work in the area of national commitments and mobilization around sanitation are considered important foundations for the sanitation movement today.



Mobilizing upwards from the region

The national level mobilization of sanitation stakeholders was actually built up from convergence at district and regional levels. Representatives from the Mid-West Development Region, UNICEF, the Netherlands development organization, SNV did a joint field visit over the course of which they came to the shared realization that, while much was happening on the ground to improve the situation in water and sanitation, there was a diversity of approaches, it was happening in different disconnected geographic locations, and while there was the experience with the three model districts mentioned above, most activities did not engage with local government bodies. As a consequence, results were not coming together to make enough of an impact where it was most needed.

Many suggest that the time was ripe; that the consensus points from Mid- and Far-West Development Region processes rang true with stakeholders at national level. Many of the actors at national level – international organizations and Ministries -- were already involved at Regional and District levels.

Creating national norms and standards

Sector transformation was of course made operational by the contents of the Master Plan which clearly set out the Guiding Principles and Strategies for all sanitation stakeholders. The Master Plan allows some flexibility, but establishes common norms, standards and practices. It builds up from the discussions and agreements in Joint Planning in the early districts and regions before 2011 and since then has been an important reference in triggering in new districts and villages, helping to entrench and disseminate the principles and strategies further. As described by

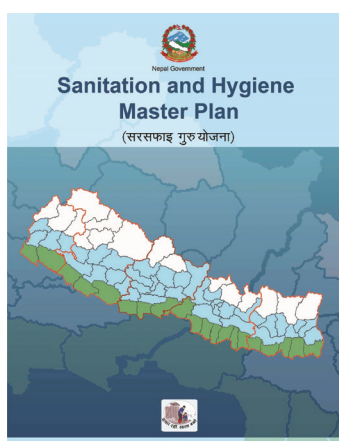


Mukti Pokharel, Deputy Director, Nepal Red Cross “You ask the DDCs, VDC, even school children; everyone knows the Master Plan”. It is seen as giving authority to local bodies to ensure that international organizations working within their areas must coordinate and follow the agreed approach.

The engagement of the National Planning Commission in the National Sanitation and Hygiene Steering and Coordination Committees was an important element in ensuring that the norms and standards of the Master Plan became a reference for wider cross-sector planning processes.



Challenging external actors to engage differently



Stronger national leadership and a clear Master Plan have changed the picture for international actors. All donors and NGOs are now called upon to ensure coordination through government processes and to adapt their programming models to be consistent with the Guiding Principles and Strategy. The stronger national coordination approach has also increased pressure on donors to support the biggest gap areas, including

the hard-to-reach regions where programme results will be slower. For the most part there has been strong support and an increased funding flow.



Challenges ahead

From the villages to offices in Kathmandu, there is a marked convergence in what people see as the biggest challenges going forward. This is perhaps a good sign that there will be convergence of efforts to address these challenges.

ODF as the beginning - sustainability

One of the challenges cited most frequently is sustainability and what happens after ODF is declared. The Master Plan clearly highlights the need for post-ODF activities and the need for external actors to commit to a broader sanitation agenda beyond the simple ODF declaration. The Master Plan further defines the key elements for the next level – “total sanitation” – with indicators such as the use of toilets, the practice of hand-washing at key moments, safe handling and treatment of drinking water, maintenance of personal hygiene, solid and liquid waste management and maintenance of toilets. There are promising signs that the process towards ODF declaration has created a strong



demand for a higher level of sanitation results. In Chitwan district, the DDC is pushing to ensure that local small factories provide latrines for workers to use. In several districts – Ilam, Banke -- key activists see the next priority and challenge to be latrines in public spaces, such as the local tea garden or near the bus stop.

Some of the elements that could help support sustainability have been identified, including districts developing a Post-ODF Strategy as well as exploring local income generation approaches to help maintain public latrines and possibly wider sanitation activities. Maintenance costs for toilets in schools have already proven to be a challenge. There is also the pressing need to strengthening local level monitoring systems to ensure that ODF status remains current. Still, there is a real fear that without the public attention of the push to ODF declaration, the momentum will not easily be sustained. Publicity and reward will continue to be important.

Quality

Another challenge is that in the push for reaching ODF declaration, toilets have often been built poorly, not meeting standards of ‘improved sanitation’ and sometimes toilets are poor enough that they are unlikely to last. Some blame the climate of competition and others point to donors and international organizations pressuring for fast results. Some, however, see this as the necessary cost of getting the momentum of a movement going, something that can be addressed in post-ODF work. There is a positive foothold in the Master Plan which clearly adopts standards for toilets in line with the global UNICEF-WHO Joint Monitoring Programme for Water and Sanitation. Similarly, the Ministry of Education has adopted a standard for Child-, Gender- and Disability-Friendly toilets for schools, which can be a starting point to promote the same standard for other public facilities.

Framing social pressure

Linked to the time pressures to achieve ODF declaration, there are numerous reports of DDCs and VDCs using more coercive tactics to get community members to build toilets, some of which have potentially negative repercussions for other child and human rights issues. Some VDCs have stipulated that

any community member who does not have a toilet will be refused all VDC services. Social protection benefits have been withheld, in some cases with the VDC allocating the resources to buy materials for the construction of the toilet.

In different locations, passports, citizenship

records, scholarships and birth registration have been withheld. For those immersed in the ODF movement, these measures are often argued to be fully justified. There is a push to have open defecation recognized as a punishable offence. For others, the measures go too far, and in essence, some of the measures are violating one right to achieve another, including undermining child rights. There is a pressing need of a clear policy on the range of sanctions that can be imposed at district and village level.



Focusing on low coverage areas

Another big challenge going forward will be getting the sanitation movement going full force in some of the regions with specific geo-physical and cultural barriers. These include the *Terai* and Mountain regions and urban areas. The *Terai* is recognized as a big challenge because of the high water table which requires a more complex flood resistant structure, but also because of the high expectations for subsidies, reinforced by continued subsidy practices just across the border in India. The *Terai* also has a low starting point – currently 8 districts in the region have less than 35 percent sanitation coverage. However, sanitation leaders point out that greater access to markets in the *Terai* presents a social marketing opportunity and the recently developing regional political leadership constitutes an opening for appealing to regional pride.

The Mountain regions by contrast face limited access to markets and so higher cost for materials as well as severely limited water supply. Experience in the Mid- and Far-West to date has shown that ODF declaration will yield a tenuous change without adequate water supply. Interviewees at district and village level consistently highlight that where water supply is limited, toilets are not cleaned and in very short order are unusable and represent as great a health risk as open defecation.

The third geo-physical challenge is sanitation in urban and semi-urban settings, where local governments must grapple with higher-cost construction of sewage systems, land ownership in slum areas as well as complex social mobilization and behaviour development around sanitation in public spaces, both open defecation and waste disposal.

Extending coverage to hard-to-reach populations

Across Nepal, and even in areas where the ODF movement is taking off, reaching disadvantaged ethnic and caste groups as well as ensuring equal access for girls and women remains an enduring challenge. In some communities, the poor *Dalit* households may actually have toilets, but still are refused access to the communal water source and are forced to get water from great distances. Similarly, attention to safe and appropriate sanitation for girls in schools as well as addressing harmful traditional practices such as *chhaupadi* requires a persistent push and is helped by ensuring a voice for girls and women in sanitation planning.

Maintaining political commitment

With the new Constituent Assembly now elected and the forthcoming local government elections, the first since 2002, many changes will come. Given the wide ranging engagement of stakeholders in ODF districts, including all political parties, there is strong reason to expect sustained political support for the movement as a whole. Still, the likely turn-over of government officials, combined by the usual turn-over among staff in international partners does suggest the need for attention to institutional memory and sustaining commitment to the shared agenda. And as some national sanitation actors highlight, there is still work required in continually building up political commitment district by district as the push for ODF advances.

Local government capacity

Perhaps more of a challenge going forward is local government capacity. Nepal has seen important achievements in piloting and rolling out important elements of local governance systems under the Local Governance and Community Development Programme; however, the programme is just gathering momentum in terms of the numbers of Districts, Villages and Wards where these mechanisms are established. Many District Offices and Village Development Committee have limited orientation, capacities and staffing. Establishing District-WASH-Coordination Committees and Village-WASH-Coordination Committees can help to build district and village capacities in some contexts, but at the same time can be held back by weak local government capacities overall.



Resources

While the sanitation movement has achieved important allocation of local resources, pushing the movement forward in new challenging regions will require human resources to trigger social mobilization. There is need for greater numbers of Master Trainers and sanitation facilitators for the challenging and populous *Terai* among other regions. At the same time, there is urgency to maintain support and attention to post-ODF. All of this is more challenging in a context where data to support comparative ODF unit costs analysis is weak.

Lessons for the future

As the sanitation movement evolves a number of lessons emerge, some that are of relevance for Nepal moving forward as well as perhaps other countries addressing major sanitation gaps. There are also lessons of potential relevance for other sectors seeking to galvanize a movement for social change.

The overarching lesson is that there is no single ingredient or recipe, that **success in a social movement like the ODF movement in Nepal depends on a complex combination of elements at different levels – local, regional, national, international – as well as seizing opportunities as they emerge – e.g. the public triggering event of the 2009 diarrhoea epidemic.**

The Nepal experience reinforces the lessons of the global community-led total sanitation movement now widely established, including the limited results from subsidies for building toilets and the power of triggering at community level through emotions of disgust and shame and the sense of a collective good. **The Nepal experience adds some different dimensions to these triggers, as sanitation leaders and activists consistently emphasize the importance of dignity, pride and prestige in triggering communities.**

The Nepal experience also emphasizes the power of engaging many stakeholders and community ownership. The involvement of many stakeholders means that a variety of voices from different parts of the community are all reinforcing the same final objective of ODF and sanitation. It provides a range of entry points for triggering – schools, local organizations, etc. Getting everyone on board has been especially important given the politically and culturally diverse context of Nepal.

Children have proven to be powerful catalysts of change – both tackling sanitation and it seems addressing some of the social practices of exclusion that present a barrier to achieving sanitation results. **Schools and their child clubs have been important entry points** to bringing children together and into the wider movement.

There is also a catalytic effect in triggering through local government structures and processes. The coordinating and steering mechanisms provided in the WASH Coordinating Committees at district and village level appear to have been a means of kicking off a wider triggering process, through leaders of different stakeholder groups in the districts and villages through to their members. In addition, working through district and village committees appears to have facilitated spin off momentum from one village to the next. Similarly, the involvement of regional government has helped in bridging from one district to the next.

It also seems that **the process of a District-level joint planning exercise for sanitation are an important step after district triggering, helping to reinforce common goals and a way forward**, including creating a local ownership of the norms established in the Master Plan, engaging all the different stakeholders across sectors, government and non-governmental and civil society organizations. The joint planning has also helped in leveraging provisions that were already established in local budget guidelines.

In all of this process, **the role of Master Trainers and sanitation facilitators has been essential.** There has been a significant shift in sanitation, from seeing the challenge as a

construction project to seeing it as a social movement. With that shift comes the realization that the critical investment required is in human resources with skills in social mobilization. Although central to the process, local government capacity is limited and district and village development committees need experienced support in initiating and shepherding the social change required.

While perhaps very culturally specific, in Nepal, **celebration and reward have been important ingredients to gearing up the sanitation movement.** Celebration feeds back into the triggering notions of pride and dignity. It has in turn triggered a certain level of competition in neighbouring villages and districts, and in a snowball effect, has made the sanitation movement attractive to leaders and followers alike.

As with any movement, leadership is critical. That the President of Nepal stepped in to launch the *National Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan* was a significant event and helped push the movement forward. In addition, there is a bottom-up and top-down process of enlisting champions at successive levels which helps create momentum for the movement. **Engaging leaders at different levels requires catalysts, individuals who are leaders in their own right and willingly share ownership and give credit to other leaders.**

The fact that the government established a *National Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan*, with its clear Guiding Principles and Strategies, articulating a long-term vision, was critical in pushing alignment across donors and international organizations. This signalled a national leadership and created the foundations for a WASH sector where there had been a confusion of different actors without coordination or common approach.

The Nepal experience presents if not a lesson, **at least one model of bringing about sector transformation, building up from local level and regional experience and achievements, where many of the same key national actors were engaged.** The sector changes in Nepal did entail key actors seizing opportunities – the crisis of 2009 and the questions it opened about results being achieved. International commitments and processes also appear to have helped. Pulling the local and regional experience into various commitments which eventually fed into the Master Plan was a process of codifying a common sector approach.

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