

Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Promotion in Ecological Sanitation in Zimbabwe

Cleophas M. Musara

Health and Hygiene Promotion Manager
Mvuramanzi Trust, P.O.Box. MR 103
Marlborough, Harare, Zimbabwe

Abstract

Ecological sanitation in Zimbabwe introduced a cultural change, where communities have always regarded human urine and faeces as a waste fit to be thrown away. For people to change and regard it as a resource and a worthy recyclable product is a process which had to be handled with care.

It was through the use of participatory methods at the beginning of the project, during the implementation phase and demonstrations that carried the day for its acceptability, use and maintenance of technical options in ecological sanitation. Hatcliffe Extension, where the experiment is taking place, had social and political instability as these people come from different areas of the country and are in that area due to different circumstances. The task of the software approach was to create a coherent group, make the group establish a common interest and facilitate them to plan and manage the project for their common good. The process involved, team building exercises, problem identification, analytical, planning and behaviour change tools. The process was to address their fears and change them into hopes and challenges.

This community of about fifteen to twenty thousand people were using five communal VIP latrines that were difficult to maintain and over-used. These latrines were placed on one side of the settlement rendering them impossible to use at night and also by children. The majority of the people then resorted to using plastic bags or buckets at night then either pour the waste in the VIP latrines in the morning or just make slurry by adding water and dump on open ground. Children were just defecating on the open ground. Mvuramanzi Trust was then requested to come up with intervention strategies to improve the above-mentioned scenario. The technologies chosen were the Fossa alterna and the sky-loo, some of the methods chosen to promote the concept of ecological sanitation in Zimbabwe.

Scope

The intervention in this peri-urban informal settlement (Hatcliffe Extension) had a number of studies that were complimenting each other to solve a particular problem. Other studies include the human and environmental health implications of recycling human waste as a fertilizer and soil conditioner, the nutritive value of faeces and urine and how best to apply them to the soil and on which plants. One of the studies examines attitudes, behaviour and practices towards ecological sanitation and human waste. The purpose of the software approach in this project is to facilitate all the studies to take place and to move communities towards active participation in decision making on technical options, use, maintenance and self-replication of the system.

Hatcliffe Extension was then made a pilot study on this participatory hygiene and sanitation promotion approach. The approach is based on the SARAR concept.

The SARAR concept thrives on the principles of non-directive, non-prescriptive, developmental, learner-centered based on people's ability to analyse their situation, make decisions on problem solving and action planning.

To achieve the above mentioned principles we had to use creative, investigative, analytical, planning, informative and monitoring and evaluation methods in a participatory manner, which included team building, establishing community institutions, investigation and problem analysis and the use and upkeep of the technology.

Once the community accepted the ecological sanitation concept we quickly went into strategies for its proper use and hygienic considerations. To achieve this, two strategies were adopted; one was to identify local educators who could be given intensive training on health and hygiene promotion and two, to give mass education and demonstrations for action in ecological sanitation development. We again let the sections to select their own cadre to be trained as an animator, a person they will respect. The group of five animators and five section secretaries were then given an intensive participatory hygiene and sanitation education. Tools used were, identification and blocking the faeco-oral transmission routes, three-pile sorting of hygienic practices, the sanitation ladder, community mapping of ecological sanitation latrine coverage, social drama, story with a gap, diarrhoea child and task target analysis just to mention but a few. These are pictures that depict different health and hygiene issues relevant and appropriate to that community. The discussion brought about by the pictures increase community awareness and level of articulating issues affecting them. The education was then extended to the community through these trained local people as well periodic section to section sessions. A clean up campaign was then organised by the development committee to clean the open spaces, the water points and the kitchens. This was done to compliment the ecological sanitation promotion taking place as well as to remove those plastic bags and children's faeces lying all over the camp. The issues of putting soil and ash after every visit to the latrine and of putting leaves or grass every week were discussed in these sessions and demonstrations of proper use done at family level.

Results

- The majority of the community accepted the fossa alterna and the sky-loo latrines and the construction was done with their active participation.
- The latrines are being properly utilised with 100% (39/39) indicating that they pour ashes and soil after every use from a survey carried out 4 to 6 months after installation of the latrines.
- From the same survey, indications are that, the majority understands why they have to pour ash or soil with 84.6% saying it was to reduce fly breeding and the rest saying it was to make the latrine smell better, to help to reduce excess moisture and to help to make compost.
- Their reaction to the composted material and its reuse in agriculture was positive with maize, beans, tomatoes, flowers etc being planted in the soil placed on top of the used fossa alterna pit and in plastic bags from the sky-loo. After removing the contents they also wanted to start tree planting.
- The development committee has been taking different visitors around the settlement explaining what they have been doing, not what the Trust has done, showing that community empowerment through participatory methods will make or break the ecological sanitation promotion.

However the concept of ecological sanitation has only recently taken root in the peri-urban and rural areas in Zimbabwe and a great deal more is to be learned about reuse, composting and safety of the products. Research projects are ongoing including the development of participatory hygiene and sanitation education methods and materials.

