

WASH CASE STUDIES SERIES



The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) is an international sector organisation that has worked since 1990 to achieve sustainable water supply and sanitation for all people, by enhancing collaboration among sector agencies and professionals.

As part of its Networking and Knowledge Management and Advocacy programmes, WSSCC encourages the development of national Water supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Coalitions. The role of the WASH Coalitions ranges from participating in information sharing to advocating specific policy changes and everything in between. Despite the variety of activities in which they participate, the WASH Coalitions have in common a commitment to addressing the need for improved systematic communication, collaboration, and joint action among sector stakeholders in their countries of operation. Most national WASH Coalitions have developed and launched WASH Campaigns as a vehicle for advocacy and awareness-raising.

WSSCC is presenting the work of the WASH Coalitions in a series of WASH Coalition country case studies. These case studies showcase the evolution, activities and impact of national WASH Coalitions. In this edition, the focus is on Nepal, where a strong WASH media campaign has dominated the activities of the WASH Coalition.

THE NEPAL WASH COALITION: ENGAGING THE MEDIA FOR AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY

According to the Nepal Government¹, only 46 percent of the Nepalese population use adequate sanitation facilities. In rural populations, which make up the majority of the Nepalese population, only 20 percent use adequate sanitation facilities. The urban population fares slightly better, as up to 37 percent have access to and properly use adequate sanitation. Unfortunately, lack of proper sanitation and hygiene contribute to 70 percent of childhood diseases in a country in which 74 out of 1000 children under 5 years old, die. Nepal also faces strong development challenges. It ranks 138th of 177 on the human poverty index², and 31 percent of the population live below the absolute poverty line³. This means that Nepal faces major hurdles in ensuring a basic standard of living, including sustainable access to adequate sanitation, for its population. The Millennium Development Goals for water and



sanitation aim to halve, by 2015, the percentage of the world's population that lacks access to safe water and basic sanitation. For Nepal, this means that the country needs to reach 53 percent sanitation coverage by 2015, which requires a total of at least 14,000 latrines to be constructed every month until 2015.

Origins and Activities

The Nepal WASH Coalition was formed in 2003 with the support of WSSCC, with the aim to increase government accountability. Original membership included the Department of Water Supply and Sewage, the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Fund Development Board, WaterAid Nepal, UNICEF, the WHO and Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH). In subsequent years, the Nepal WASH Coalition has emerged as an advocacy and communications-driven entity as a result of its increased interaction with various media organizations.

Working with the media

In 2004, Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH) and other members of the WASH Coalition

embarked on a 'Media Campaign on Sanitation,' after identifying a significant lack of general awareness about sanitation issues. Journalist orientation programmes were implemented in a number of regions, and the drive resulted in a spate of articles in the local press - newspapers, magazines and periodicals - about sanitation, propelling this otherwise neglected and often taboo subject into the mainstream of public consciousness.

Articles such as Bickram Niraula's 'A daily routine of going to the river carrying a bag of faeces', published on the 28th of March 2004, in *Rajdhani*, helped to break the silence on this embarrassing topic with lines like,

"Girish Satar of Biratnagar...usually goes on a desperate search for a plastic bag before sunset, preparing for a toilet emergency at night. In case he has to defecate in the dark hours, he uses the plastic bag and carries it to the nearby river at daybreak."

In the same article, he goes on to describe an altercation between neighbours, centred around a bag of faeces that had been unceremoniously lobbed into a field, where it sat until discovered by the field owner. Bickram writes,

"Goliya Khatun of Samsad tole says that she makes it a point to give plastic bags to all the visitors ...sometimes the visitors and children throw such plastic bags in the neighbours' fields leading to heated arguments... For instance the big fight that broke out when Noor Muhammed threw the plastic bag full of faeces in the corn field of Gafur Miya had to be decided by the village panchayat (tribunal)..."

Amusing as it might be for Western audiences to read, the sober and rather matter-of-fact way in which the article is written aptly exposes the terrible reality and the social consequences (not to mention the health effects) of poor sanitation. The article also exposes the tragic truth that poverty is both the root and result of inadequate sanitation.

Another article, 'Waiting for dark to defecate' by Madhu Rai, published on the 31st of March 2004, in *Ghatna Ra Bichaar*, recounts the experience of village women in their attempt to preserve their dignity and their privacy, by waiting until the end of the day to defecate. This heart wrenching article describes how the women are "compelled to live their lives in discomfort and anxieties," and also risk being attacked by snakes and wild animals when defecating after dark. Once again, the media source breaks down social taboos, and expose the harsh realities of life without sanitation. The following excerpt from



Lack of safe water supply and sanitation robs hundreds of millions of women of dignity, energy and time
(Sir Richard Jolly, WSSCC Progress Report 2000-2003)



There is no need to ask for the direction to the latrine in many important and public offices in the capital. As you enter the main gate of these buildings the strong foul smell directly leads you there
(Latrine Sample Survey, 2005).



The biggest barrier in Sanitation is the unwillingness of national and international political leaders to put excreta and its safe disposal on the international development agenda (Human Development Report, 2006).



Though the government has allocated 6.19 billion Rupees for drinking water through the annual budget for FY 2006/07, yet an independent budget for sanitation promotion does not exist.

the article demonstrates just how unbearable and dangerous the absence of proper sanitation can be.

"Thus the women are compelled to live their lives in discomfort and anxiety, waiting for the night to fall in order to defecate/urinate. Going out in the dark, they are more vulnerable to attacks from wild animals and especially in the Tarai region they are at a higher risk of being sexually abused. Further, majority of these women suffer from various kinds of diseases related to urinary tract because of prolonged holding."

All of these articles have been compiled by NEWAH in a publication called 'Browsing through the newspaper: The Status of Sanitation in Nepal' the first edition of which was published in March 2005. The publication, along with the media campaign, was repeated for 2005 and 2006, and is expected to become a permanent feature of the Nepal WASH Coalition's activities in the coming years. NEWAH continues to support activities that engage and educate members of the media on issues of sanitation. NEWAH also updates journalists on upcoming water and sanitation issues, and encourages them to take the agenda to a higher political level. The 2006 edition of 'Browsing through the newspaper' followed NEWAH's collaboration with a group of women media professionals, Sancharika Samuha (which began in 2004 with a Feature Service Program to highlight gender perspectives on sanitation) and the Nepal Forum for Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ). It is dedicated almost exclusively to the issue of gender in sanitation, and features articles that resulted from Sancharika Samuha and NEFEJ's Chitwan Media Campaign. It contains articles published in both 2004 and 2005.

The Nepal WASH Coalition's involvement with the media extends beyond articles however, and its role as an advocacy-centred coalition, capable of using a variety of methods, is cemented by efforts like monitoring eight national dailies for sanitation and water issues in 2006 and 2007,

and organising 'Meet the Press' programmes to strengthen partnerships with the media and inform them about sanitation issues. The latter activity consisted of briefing journalists on sanitation issues and taking them to a village with problematic sanitation, to witness the issue firsthand. Journalists were involved in placing bright flags on faeces and, by the end of the tour, the villages were covered with these flags. The journalists engaged with residents of the village they visited, interviewing them and gathering material for reports that were later filed.

Nepal WASH also actively promotes and participates in the global WASH Media Award competition, which awards journalists from developing countries for the best articles on WASH issues. Moreover, the WASH Coalition has produced a documentary, entitled 'Sanitation Our Issue', highlighting problems women face because of the absence of latrines in public places, and how this affects their daily lives. The documentary aired on national television during the 7th National Sanitation Week. Ongoing projects include the newsletter 'Pani ra Sarsafai', an important quarterly sector publication on sanitation and water issues, for which the WASH Coalition serves as the editorial board, and the WASH calendar published every March and distributed at the grassroots level to the members of parliament. The Coalition is eager to produce as many materials as possible in the local languages, as this will significantly strengthen the impact of the materials.

All this work with the media has resulted in a marked increase in reporting on water, sanitation and hygiene issues in the media. Media monitoring over the last four years has shown that media coverage on sanitation issues has steadily increased and that the sensitivity of journalists has grown. Media personalities are more willing to pursue the issues in the press and even journalists from the mid and far western regions, previously reluctant to do so, have started writing on sanitation issues. Some

of these journalists have sent in their articles to be considered for the International WASH Media Award competition. Sanitation media coverage was further encouraged by local media competitions, despite the fact that the media campaign that carried these competitions took place during an extremely eventful period of Nepalese history, in which articles on sanitation had to compete for space with many headline stories relating to the insurgency and palace and party politics over the course of 2006 and 2007. The response from female journalists was particularly encouraging, as 50 percent of award winners were female. This is a significant achievement, considering that the media is a male-dominated sector in Nepal.

A broader focus

In addition to the media work, the Nepal WASH Coalition involves itself in numerous other activities. These include the 'Sanitation Model District Approach' programme, which adopts the School Led Total Sanitation (SLTS) approach to achieve total sanitation in the Chitawan district by 2009; and an appeal letter, sent in June 2007 by the Nepal WASH Coalition to the Ministry of Finance (MOF), Ministry of Physical Planning and Works (MPPW) and National Planning Commission (NPC), requesting a separate sanitation budget line. Finally, for World

Toilet Day on 19 November 2007, the Nepal WASH Coalition organised a meeting of sector professionals entitled '*Sanitation for All in Nepal: Challenges and our Responsibilities*', to discuss how to improve and increase sanitation action in Nepal.

Conclusion

The Nepal WASH Coalition is able to leverage media coverage and establish the ties needed to bring lasting change in the sanitation and water supply situation in Nepal. It has successfully increased coverage of sanitation issues in the media, educated communities and villages on the benefits of good hygiene practices, and has been able to convince the Government to endorse the Sanitation Model District Approach programme. The Nepal WASH Coalition also encourages sector stakeholders to come together as a group, in order to voice needs and suggest changes. As it grows in influence, the Nepal WASH Coalition brings much needed attention to a sector that is often shrouded in stigma.

¹ Nepal Government Three Year Interim Plan (2007)

² Human Development Report 2006

³ Nepal Living Standards Survey 2004

For an up-to-date account of Nepal WASH activities, please visit the Nepal Country Page on the WSSCC website: www.wsscc.org

For more information on the Nepal WASH Coalition or to get involved with the activities, please contact the WSSCC National Coordinator for Nepal:

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