

Title:

“Female local latrine builders: contributing towards objectives of international year of sanitation, 2008”

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Abstract

This paper shows the effectiveness of Women Local Latrine Builders (LLB) to arouse change in society and prove themselves as an example to those who presumes that women are just the followers of men incapable of doing anything without their support. Parameters like women' ability to work as an artisan, level of self confidence, openness and their capacity in supporting family needs with the increased income level have been analyzed to observe the outcome result. The changes in the view towards women and the respect women received in doing the job, their earning capacity equivalent to men has been evaluated as result.

This paper also deals with the need of trainings to both men and women to enhance their skills. This type of trainings has to be organized in combination with men to provide women with confidence to develop capacity while doing counterpart work staying in equal level with men. To become a change maker in society and to lead whole community towards one target is a challenge and their effect to make such target successful is been studied.

Keywords

Impacts, Latrine, Women

Main text

Introduction

Rural Village Water Resources Management Project (RVWRMP) is bilateral development cooperation in water resources sector between the Government of Nepal and Government of Finland. Kailali, is one of the project district located in the plain area of far west region where the project is supporting Local bodies, mainly District Development Committees (DDCs) for executing arsenic mitigation and environmental sanitation activities in six Village Development Committees (VDCs). The project is supporting Environmental Sanitation through development of infrastructures like indirect pit latrine, platform around the hand pump, utensil-drying platform, garbage pit construction and concrete type arsenic bio-sand filter at household level.

Users Committees (UCs) are the main responsible bodies for implementing and managing the operation and maintenance of schemes. Capacity building at local level is an inherent component of the project. Local Latrine Builder's (LLB) training was given to the people selected by community, encouraging the participation of female and disadvantaged groups.

The linkages between women, sanitation and health and hygiene practices are strong, abundant, diverse and often self-evident. Women dominate sanitation activities. So, female local latrine builders can be the pillars for achieving the total sanitation. Sanitation activities are succeeding in those places where female are involved in the process. So keeping this point in mind, Rural Village Water Resources Management Project has taken a step of involving women in the sanitation process by involving them in Local Latrine Building (LLB). This step has helped women not only to be involved in the software part or be involved only inside the household but also to be involved in the hardware part by constructing the latrine in the scheme area working hand by hand along with men.

Kailali District is located in the plain area of Terai region, there is no scarcity of water as handpump is installed in each household. The working area of this project is rural area to reach the poorest of the poor. People from the scheme area are in the habit to defecate in rivers and in forests so people neglect the necessity of toilet. So, firstly it is requisite that they have to have a habit of defecating in the toilet. Then other technical option has to be seen to manage the faeces making it more environment and ecology friendly. Local Latrine Building training was organized in Sandepani VDC of Kailali District consisting 16 participants (10 male and 7 female). This training was organized for the people from 6 VDCs of Kailali district. One male and one female were participating in the training from each village. These artisans were asked to adhere to specifications in latrine construction given them in training.

The project is providing the latrine named as "Sulabh Latrine". Sulabh flush compost toilet is eco-friendly, technically appropriate, socio-culturally acceptable and economically affordable. It is an indigenous technology and the toilet can easily be constructed by local labour and materials. It provides health benefits by safe disposal of human excreta on-site. It consists of a pan with a steep slope and an especially designed trap with waterseal requiring only 1.5 to 2 litres of water for flushing, thus helping conserve water. It does not need scavengers to clean the pits. There are two pits of varying size and capacity depending on the number of users (Sulabh international). In the project, the toilet pan used is water seal type, connected alternatively to two pits each of height 1.10 m and diameter 1m. The toilet and pit is connected through 110 mm diameter, 1m long HDPE pipe. The basic principle of on-site

sanitation is: liquids infiltrate into the soil and the solids are retained, anaerobically digested and have to be removed (M. Feroze, 2000). When one pit is full, the incoming excreta is diverted into the second pit. The sludge gets digested and is almost dry and pathogen free, thus safe for handling as manure. Digested sludge is odourless and is a good manure and soil-conditioner. It can be dug out easily and used for agricultural purposes. The cost of emptying the pit can be met partially from the cost of manure made available (Sulabh international). This product as fertilizer is aimed to reduce the use of chemical fertilizer causing not only to support livelihood of community by supporting them to spend less amount of money in fertilizer but also to protect environment which is prone to be polluted by the by-product of chemical fertilizer. This way of use of "human manure" closes ecological cycle making the environment cleaner free from human excreta left openly in surroundings and which is the major source of disease. Hence, the latrine is closer to the ecological sanitation.

Communities from the scheme area in Kailali district of RVWRMP are not accustomed to use latrine. Water Supply and Sanitation Coverage data of Nepal shows that sanitation coverage of those VDCs are less than 20% (including pit latrines as well as permanent latrine) and in RVWRMP's working areas of Kailali district, it is even less than 5% (including pit latrines as well as permanent latrine). So, to make people habituated to defecate in one particular place is the matter of gainsay to the project. In this context, as the emergence of sanitation the project is providing 1148 number of sulabh pour-flush latrine. Apart from sulabh latrine, the project is providing 5 numbers of urine-faeces diverting eco-san latrine in pilot scale each in 6 VDC (Total 35 number) to see the acceptability and use of this latrine. The extension and promotion of sulabh latrine is made based on the experience gained from the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project (RWSSSP) in Lumbini zone of Nepal. Based on this experience, this type of latrine is more acceptable by the communities. In the present conditions also, people from the scheme area prefer sulabh pour-flush latrine than eco-san latrine. According to the users, the reason for choosing Sulabh latrine to eco-san latrine is that sulabh latrines are easier to use. Management of product from the latrine is also easier than eco-san latrine. People mainly feel burden to handle urine. Depending upon the adoptability, the project is flexible to move more towards of ecological latrines. However, it is yet to see that whether or not people will use the decomposed night soil from the pit in their farm. Enough knowledge on the use of decomposed night soil in the farm and its benefits were share to community. At present, they agree to follow the instruction to use the night soil in their farm.

Methods

This paper is prepared based on the field observations through visits to the settlements, interaction with sulabh latrine and eco-san latrine users and female LLBs. A set of questionnaire was prepared for female LLB and community to extract their views regarding female LLB's involvement to do counterpart work as that of men and earning equivalent to men. Literature review of different publications and journals were done to explore the idea related to the topic. For the preparation of this paper apart from basic observations of field, questionnaire was asked to 6 Female LLBs working in the programme VDCs of Kailali District. 4 female LLB were Chaudari ethnic group, 2 were from chettri family. Only one female LLB Ms. Nirmala Chaudari youngest among other female LLB of 18 years old has studied upto 10 standard. Two other were literate enough to read and write. Questionnaire was also asked to 15 users of eco-san latrine and sulabh latrine.

Results and Discussions

It is recognized that better performance and sustainability of Water Supply and Sanitation projects result from women's involvement (Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 1997). Particularly in deep rural areas, women still carry almost sole responsibility for reproductive tasks. These include household tasks such as cooking, cleaning and washing. Women raise and nurture the children and show them how to look after themselves. Women carry most of the responsibility for caring the elderly and the sick. For these reasons, women tend to be the most direct beneficiaries of improved knowledge on health and hygiene related issues. Moreover, when women's raised awareness is translated into better hygiene practice, there will be obvious benefits all round for their children, the elderly, their families, and the wider community. Therefore, the first targets of health and hygiene messages should be women. Especially for women, sanitation is also about privacy, and dignity.

Being trained LLBs, female LLBs were able to earn certain amount of money. This money has become the source of dignity, eminent and honor in the society. Focusing especially to female latrine builders, it is a matter of giving worth to self. Women LLBs have valued themselves and have felt self reliant, assured and secured. The job has also encouraged them to be motivated in doing the same types of job in the future. According to them, the community has changed their perception towards them. People speak, listen to them and regard their views. Their family has also changed their view about them. According to female LLB Ms. Khagisara Sapkota, her husband has started to respect her more. She gets help from her husband while she be out of her house for the work. Children are more attached to mother than father. Therefore, strengthening capacity of mother alternatively means supporting their children with necessary requirement. Ms. Sapkota is supporting her children for their education. This level of respect could boost her up to proceed forward in other field also with the same level of confidence.

Women have mostly used the money to support their house and their livelihood. They have support their family in income generating activities and serve their children. Female LLB: Ms. Nirmala Chaudari has earned her income to support her family needs. From her earning, she has used \$250 for her family needs, \$100 for vegetable farming and has lend \$65 on interest. Another benefit she is approaching is: increase in marriage proposal after recognition as LLB. Her capability is eyed by all neighbours and thus she is getting choice to choose a right person among many. This could also reduce the dowry system if people get attracted more towards women' long lasting and life supporting capability than the present dowry. Through their work as LLB they have been able to earn certain amount of money and more amount of confidence. Till date each female LLB has earned around \$400 by constructing average of 52 toilets.

Local community of Bhajani VDC, Mr Ram Bahadur Chaudari says, after the construction of latrines in their community, the settlement has become cleaner and people has started to be motivated in hand washing after using toilet. There used to be scattered faeces along the sides of road but this is not the case now. They are now proud for getting their village cleaner. There is also less chances of attack by wild beast. More time is saved and the saved time can be utilized in other beneficial jobs. Ms Sita Shahi of Dododhara VDC says, the female has proved to become the leaders in the society. They have seen them being successful through their own eye and are now sure that women from their society can also work equivalent to men. They have heard the women leaders proving to be successful in their relative field but

now it could also be the case in their society. Society regard the views of LLB and their views get more weightage. The community said that this type of awareness raising programmes should continue in the future also. Men are now willing to send their female in similar jobs in the future. Some of the community who have not built their toilet have to be motivated and this can be done by regular advising and also highlighting the benefits of toilet. Mr. Indra Bahadur Malla of Sandepani VDC says that penalty system can also help them to built toilets.

Female LLB: Ms. Sita Rani Chaudari of Lalbojhi VDC has benefited tremendously from the programme. She is from very marginalized family with very low economic standard living with her husband, father in law, mother in law and uncle in law. Her husband lost his hand while going to India for seasonal work and her uncle in law is handicap by birth. She is only a working person and source of income in her family. Before her work as LLB in village, she used to work as labour in her neighbour's farm to earn the livelihood of her family. To be a member of very poor family that too of handicapped family has been one of the curse of her life. In such condition, the job has been a limelight in her life. As the case of other female LLB, her family and society has started to respect her. Her feeling is changed and the respect she received in her life after recognition as LLB is very much valued by her. She wants to give continuity to her job in the future on similar job.

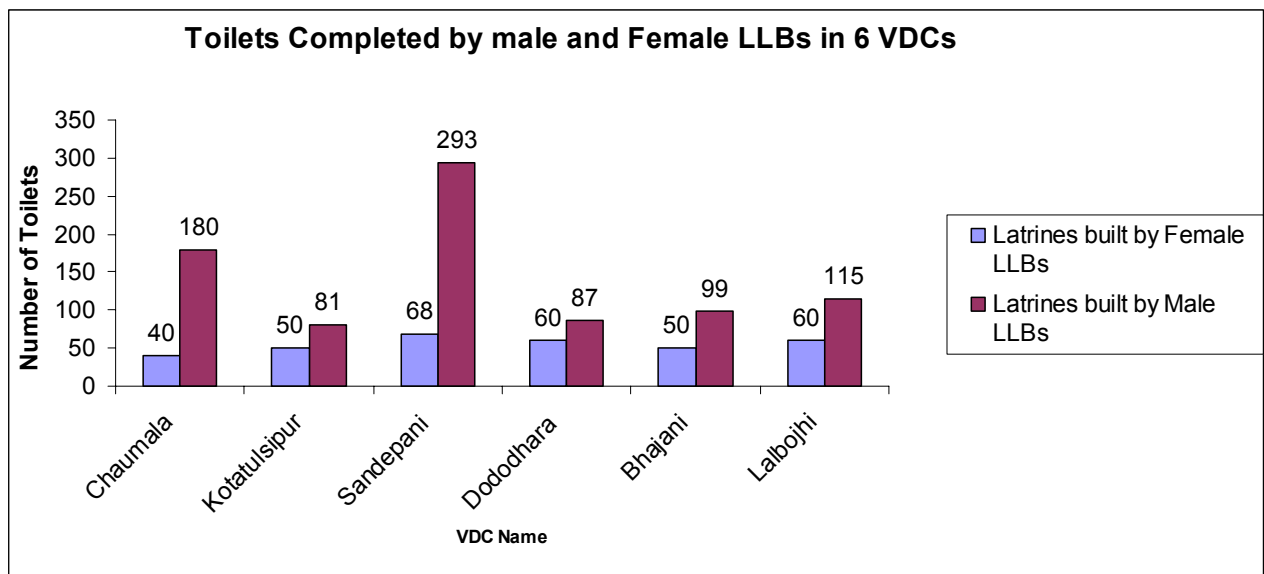


Figure 1: Comparison of Toilets built by female and male LLB VDC wise

The above charts shows that latrine build by female is only 28%. The significant difference occurred due to absence of female LLB, Ms. Manpati Chaudari. She had taken some money as advance for mason building. So, even after taking LLB training she had to complete her task else she would be in debt. So, she choosed to work as mason builder for clearing her debt. In other VDCs also the percentage of latrine build by men is higher than women. This is because women have to continue in-house work but men are able to work freely in their work compared to women.



Figure 2: Female LLB, Ms. Khagisara Sapkota busy in latrine construction, Dododhara VDC



Figure 3: House of Mr Changu Chaudari, with latrine. Sandepani VDC, 9

Conclusions

Women must be empowered through participatory training. For a greater success in Sanitation works women are available whole day in society so that better and effective promotion of sanitation could be achieved. Training involving both gender groups are more successful to promote confidence level of female and has also proved to be the cornerstone for the promotion of gender. Females' personality, mind and thoughts are developing through the opportunity to be LLB and the remuneration from their endeavours work supplements their family income. As a "trend-setter", female like Nirmala Chaudari is becoming the model for all young girls and is finding forums to interact and express her views. In Nepal which is predominantly male dominated society, where women have low status and position, these changes in women's roles and responsibilities through the female LLB represent a dramatic leap towards the empowerment of women and towards equality between men and women.

Promotion of women involvement at national and international levels can also provide women forum for exploring ownself where presently men have prominence. Women Local Latrine Builders have proved to be trendsetters in Kailali district's service area of RVWRMP. The old concept and taboos maintained for women in those villages have changed. People's perception and norms is modified and are now boosted to make their females in houses equally active by making them take part in many public meetings and trainings. Old peoples' have now started to be moved by female active activities in their society. The women LLB for the first time, were consulted and involved in a programme dominated by men's decisions, in spite of it being a women's domain. Their personnel dealing and interaction to female have shown that they are now respecting female LLB who were once treated as their follower and was made forced to be dominated due to lack of capacity and knowledge. Contribution made by female LLB by their enormous labor has proved to be supplementing their family. Amount of money they are earning by their skill as LLB has proved to be weapon to tackle the society about female's potentiality. Women in the role of Local Latrine Builder showed a very strong "Demonstration effect" contributing towards increased number of construction of sanitation facilities, their use and behavioral change towards better sanitation practices.

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