

Promotion of Dry Toilets for Reducing Vulnerability for the Poor Women Having Islamic and Cultural Values in Urban Slums of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

A major challenge faced by Bangladesh as a developing country in the water and sanitation sector is human waste management and disposal especially in urban slums. On the other hand high population density influences as a negative factor for the urban slum households in installing latrines that requires using much water. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of water in the urban slums. So, promotion of dry toilet has many advantages in terms of reducing water use during anal cleaning and special periods of women. Keeping all these in mind, particularly the Islamic belief and cultural values, a special social mobilization campaign for changing the people's perception and behaviour was designed to promote dry toilets. Microcredit support was also channeled for the poor women dwellers of the slums for purchasing toilet papers, low-cost sanitary pads etc. The study aims at identifying the perception of different women groups and how to integrate dry toilets in water scarce areas to reduce the use of water without affecting the Islamic and cultural values. This study reviewed different attempts made to promote dry toilets, interest in this technology and suggested improvement for replication.

Key words: Islamic & cultural values, poor women, slums, water scarcity

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh as a developing country faces a great challenge in human waste management and disposal especially in urban slums located in major six cities. The average population density in slum is 205,415 per square kilometer and in contrast in the city area is 23,378 (Slums of Urban Bangladesh, 2005). Government of Bangladesh in conformity with the MDG sets the target one step ahead to achieve 100% sanitation for all by 2010. Health is the most important resource of the poor women particularly those who earn their livelihood by manual labour. There is a huge loss of their productivity which affects their earnings due to water and sanitation related diseases. It not only affects the individual but the national economic growth as well. In spite of poor understanding, regarding the relationship between sanitation & health and appropriate hygiene education, poverty as well as high population density influences as a negative factor for the urban slum households in installing latrines that requires using much water. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of water in the urban slums. On the contrary, in the rural areas, water is available and free of cost. So, promotion of dry toilet has many advantages in terms of reducing water use during anal cleaning and special periods of women. Microcredit support was also made available for poor women dwellers of the slums for purchasing toilet papers, low-cost sanitary pads etc.

The study aims at looking into the views of different actors and how to integrate dry toilets in water scarce areas to reduce the use of water without affecting the religious and cultural values.

METHODS

The study was designed mainly to test whether dry toilet issues could be promoted in slums where water is scarce and more importantly where slum dwellers mostly follow Islamic values and culture inherited from their ancestors. Experts say that dry toilet promotion is not only difficult in this subcontinent but will also face a great challenge where religion and culture always go with the wet toilet system. So, the outcome of the study will be an input to the sector stakeholders that how dry toilet promotion could be done and what approaches needed to be followed for behavioural change to meet the social challenges faced by the slum poor, especially women. The specific objectives are:

- To promote dry toilet in urban slum communities of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh.
- Mobilization of selected household members in using less water in anal cleaning and special period of women in a hygienic way using toilet papers.
- To identify key considerations that can encourage dry toilet.

The study was conducted based on the initial assumption that specific slum areas where water is scarce, people will be in greater need of dry toilet. The interested households were verified through contacts with opinion leaders' especially religious leaders and health workers. Importance of using toilet papers (never used before by the slum dwellers and even not known to them) that reduced using water was discussed. To have a rolling impact initially the tissue papers were fully subsidized for the vulnerable group. Microcredit supports were also made available. The household members, in particular women were made aware of the potential benefits of anal cleaning using toilet paper that considerably reduced water use. Substantial skills are required to find out the true aspirations and priorities of the house hold members. Individual household discussions were used as an effective means to disseminate the dry toilet concept .

The significant approaches were as follows.

- ◆ Discussion with the user's households on water scarcity problems.
- ◆ Islamic and cultural issues that permits use of dry toilet in water scarce areas and economic benefit.
- ◆ The catalytic role of health workers and religious leaders in promoting the concept.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that dry toilet promotion is only possible where water is scarce and people stopped using more water in anal cleansing and in menstruation period. A new dimension also came up that the disabled has taken it with great enthusiasm. It is very difficult to get the answers of the key points (table-1) as socially asking such type of questions are not usually acceptable.

The following table will give an overview on the findings:

Sl.No	Key Points	Expected Change	Actual Change
1.	Use of toilet tissue paper by all household members in anal cleaning	100%	73%
2.	Use of toilet tissue paper by female household members in anal cleaning	100%	79%
3.	Use of toilet tissue paper by male household members in anal cleaning	100%	76 %
4.	Use of toilet tissue paper in cleaning the bottom of the children	100%	65%
5.	Use of toilet tissue paper by house wife/adolescent girls in special period.	100%	58 %

Table 1: Use of toilet tissue paper in different cleansing time

The above results no doubt have given remarkable and immensely important study findings as an input for the dry toilet promoters and for other stakeholders too, especially where water is scarce. The study findings show that 50% water use is reduced in each anal cleansing and interestingly the use of toilet tissue papers speeded up for its ease use vis-à-vis finishing the cleansing formalities in such a way that lead to custom and culture of Islam.

Further, the study has shown that interestingly people preferred using tissue paper mainly due to water constraint and also ease in cleaning. But continuity of use of tissue paper by them in the short water supply area needs to be investigated to find out how the users behave in sustaining or whether backfire to original position. Nevertheless, this change from using more water for cleaning after defecation to less water use after defecation evaded many economic and health problems.

The study findings also suggest that effective planning requires a participatory, bottom up process to reflect community demand and choice where religious priests could act as a catalytic pressure group to promote this concept. Furthermore, the video showed on sanitation, especially drama and cartoon shows in different circle tremendously influenced women and children. Microcredit support was also provided those who wanted to get the tissue papers and low cost sanitary pad. The study has shown a very positive result although it did not follow the blue print as stipulated for dry toilet promotion.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on observation and experience, it is found that one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate for the dry toilets exactly what it meant, particularly for the region where religion and culture stands as a barrier. So, especially designed social mobilization for using dry toilets has been recognized as one of the main strategies to reduce vulnerability of poor women living in the urban slums. The study identified the different process adopted by different organizations in promoting safe sanitation and how to integrate dry toilets to reduce the use of water without affecting the Islamic and cultural values .This study reviewed different attempts made that promote dry toilets, interest in this technology and its replication. The important finding is that the process adapted to promote dry toilet reduced water up to 50%. It is expected that all these will provide an input to the sector stakeholders regarding the success and problems, present practices and suggestions for future dry toilet interventions/promotion modalities in slum areas where Islamic and cultural values are prominent.

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