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Barisal - A Successful Approach for Sanitation

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The rural water supply
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Barisal - A Successful Approach for Sanitation

Five years ago Barisal shared the same public health problems as other parts of Bangladesh - few sanitary latrines, many open or hanging latrines and widespread practice of open defecation. But since the late 1980s there has been a district-wide effort to improve sanitation in Barisal.

Today, three Thanas in Barisal District are a public health success story - Banaripara, Gournadi, and Agoiljhara. In Gournadi and Agoiljhara over 60% of the households now have sanitary latrines, and in Banaripara the figure is over 80%. This is well above the 1993 national rural average of 33%.

A Successful Coalition for Change

The success in Barisal has been based on an effective coalition of many sectors of society - government officials, public representatives, DPHE, NGOs and schools. The campaign was coordinated by DPHE and the involvement of schools was seen as particularly important.

বানরীপাড়া উপজেলার
প্রতি পরিবারে একটি করিয়া
সম্মত পায়খানা তৈরীর
দোলা



A Strategy to Improve Sanitation

This booklet is intended to help government departments, NGOs, and other interested groups plan and implement a campaign to improve sanitation over a Thana wide area. The experience in Barisal can provide a practical example of a successful strategy for change.

The Essential Steps

● Alliance Building

Build an alliance of local organizations to work on the sanitation campaign - schools, NGOs, government, religious and public service groups.

● Publicity

Make people aware of the sanitation campaign by using every available method - meetings, processions, posters, schools, mosques, miking, radio, etc.

● Information

Make sure that every family, especially the women, understand the benefits of good sanitation and personal hygiene. Use meetings, posters, videos, and house to house visits to spread information.

● Technical Assistance

Build demonstration latrines to show people the range of low cost technology. Send workers to the villages to show people how to build sanitary latrines properly.

● Monitoring

Use charts and forms to show the progress of the campaign. Send workers to the villages to see whether latrines have been built and whether they are being used. Plan return visits after one or two years to make sure that new pits are dug when the old ones are filled up.



The Integrated Approach

The momentum for change in Barisal began with the Integrated Approach for sanitation. This links safe water with hygienic latrines and good personal hygiene.

Over 90% of households in Bangladesh now have access to safe water, but despite this the incidence of diarrhoea remains high, and 260,000 children still die every year from diarrhoea in Bangladesh.

Safe water alone is not enough to prevent the spread of diarrhoeal diseases. Good sanitation and good personal hygiene are also necessary. In areas where water, sanitation and education for personal hygiene have been combined, researchers have found that the incidence of diarrhoea drops.

The Importance of Hand Washing

ICDDR,B research into shigella has shown that hand washing with soap or ash can cut down on the transmission of the disease.

Linking Tubewells and Latrines

Everyone wants a tubewell, but not everyone understands the need for hygienic latrines. In Barisal, as in other areas where the Integrated Approach has been followed, tubewells have been linked with latrines to take advantage of the universal desire for clean water.

Each of the families applying for a tubewell is motivated to build a hygienic latrine before the new tubewell is built. Since there are always many more applicants for tubewells than there are tubewells available, this is a powerful motivator, and in many places in Barisal more than ten latrines are built for each new tubewell.

Alliance Building

Many sanitation projects have improved sanitation in a few villages, but in Barisal there has been Thana wide improvement. This is because so many different groups in Barisal were all working towards the goal of better sanitation and better health for all.

In all the successful Thanas schools took a major role, along with NGOs, DPHE, government officials and Union Parishad chairmen.

Schools and Madrassas

Schools and madrassas were very active in the sanitation programme in Barisal, especially in Banaripara Thana which now has the highest rate of sanitary latrines in the country.

District and local workshops were held for headteachers and school management committees. They were told about the campaign to improve sanitation and personal hygiene and were asked to build sanitary latrines in their own homes and persuade their neighbors to do so as well. Following this, there were meetings at each school to

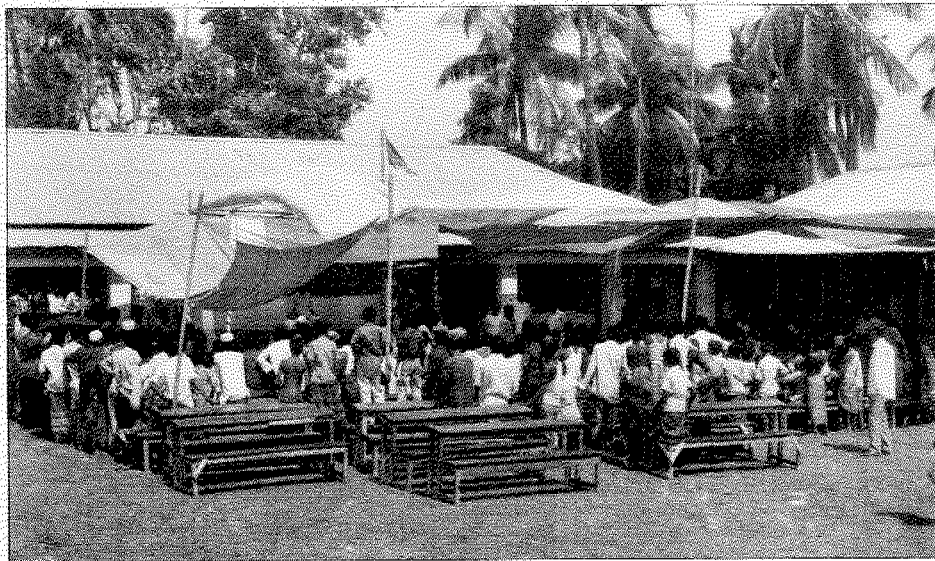


Photo: Shamsuddin Ahmed

Effective Allies

The school network has proved to be an effective channel to reach families of students and community members.



explain about the campaign and give students and parents information about the importance of hygienic latrines and hand washing. And demonstration latrines were built in each school compound.

Headteachers were given progress forms for monitoring latrine building. Using these forms, teachers and students went from house to house in the villages to motivate villagers to build sanitary latrines and record the number that were built.

In Banaripara, there was a competition between the schools and one girl's school, one boy's school, and one madrassa were given awards for achieving the highest coverage of hygienic latrines in the Thana.

District and Thana Officers

The District Commissioner of Barisal took a very active role in the sanitation programme. He took part in meetings and processions, and wrote letters to support improved sanitation. He told Union Parishad Chairmen that if they had good sanitation in their Union he would allocate more wheat to them. He also motivated the Thana Nirbahi Officers (TNOs) to support the sanitation programme. Many TNOs became active organizers for improved sanitation in their own Thanas.

DPHE

Sub-Assistant Engineers at the Thana level coordinated the sanitation programme and encouraged other organizations to become involved, as well as, using their own workers in the campaign.

The personal involvement of the Sub-Assistant Engineers was very important. Many of them showed dedication in their work. In December 1990, for example, two young children died from diarrhoea in Bashuderpara. When the Sub-Assistant Engineer became aware of this, he went to the place with his tubewell mechanics and together they went door to door to explain how the villagers could protect their young children from diarrhoea by improving sanitation and personal hygiene. Within 15 days, all the old unhygienic latrines were gone and each household had a hygienic latrine.

In all the successful Thanas, DPHE tubewell mechanics added sanitation motivation to their normal work of tubewell repair and installation. They linked safe water to sanitation by motivating villagers to build latrines in return for safe water. And they also carried with them

small models of sanitary latrines, as well as posters and leaflets so that they could show families how to build and maintain sanitary latrines.

NGOs

A number of NGOs work in Barisal district - Grameen Bank, CARE, CARITAS and other local NGOs. Many of them have their own well-established sanitation programmes. Since the beginning of the campaign the NGOs have coordinated their efforts with the other groups working in the Thana, and have divided up responsibility,— so that they each cover different areas. The NGOs taught people how to build low cost sanitary latrines and gave health information about the importance of sanitation and hand washing.

Government Workers

In some Thanas in Barisal, Family Welfare Visitors (FWVs), Family Welfare Assistants (FWAs), and Social Workers put a new emphasis on explaining the need for good sanitation to their clients. They also helped to distribute UNICEF posters that teach people how to build sanitary latrines and about hand washing with soap or ash.

Private Sector

Many richer villagers buy latrines from private producers. A locally made five rings waterseal latrine costs taka 400.

The private sector is becoming increasingly important. DPHE engineers in Barisal have observed that as people become used to the idea of sanitary latrines, they often want to upgrade their latrines.

Photo: Shehzad Noorani



Private Sector

A lucrative family enterprise: production and sale of concrete latrine parts.

Publicity

In Barisal many different techniques were used to create awareness of the need for improved sanitation.

Meetings

In addition to their regular meetings to coordinate the sanitation campaign, the District Commissioner and TNOs, along with DPHE and UNICEF called special meetings at the Thana and Union levels. They invited public representatives and government officials, NGO workers, UNICEF officers, religious leaders, teachers, headmasters, and leaders of women's groups. Often a few hundred people attended these meetings.

During the meetings speakers explained why improved sanitation was needed in Barisal, and described how each sector could help to achieve better sanitation. Videos about sanitation were usually shown.

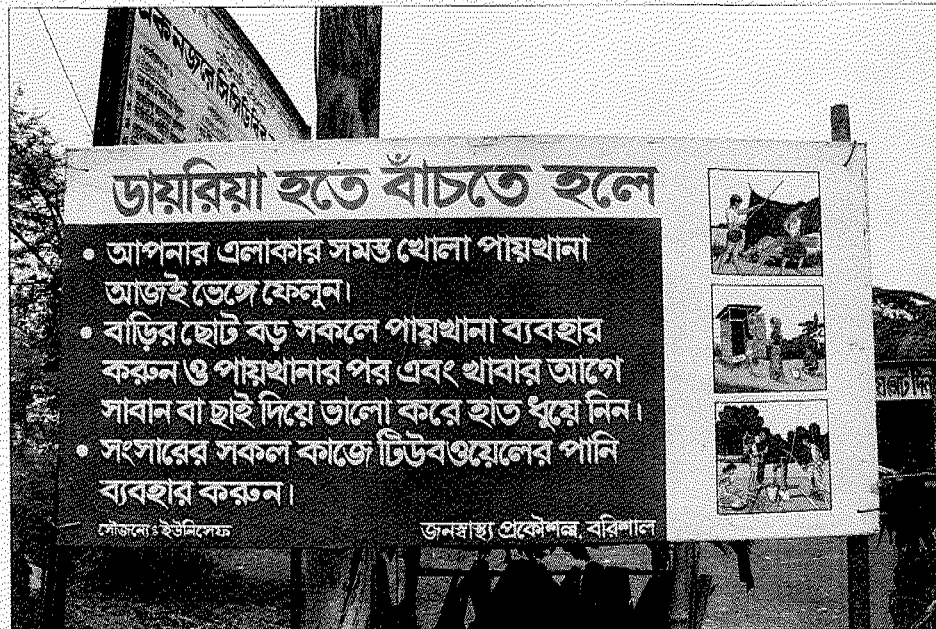


Photo: Shamsuddin Ahmed

Bill Board

A bill board displaying messages on sanitation and hygiene.





Photo: Shehzad Noorani

Miking

In a number of areas miking was used to deliver the messages about sanitation and health.

Processions

Processions, with banners and placards, were held by many organizations, schools, DPHE, NGOs, to make people more aware of the need for improved sanitation.

Leaflets

The District Commissioner signed a leaflet that explained the need for improved sanitation and informed people about the laws of Bangladesh that require hygienic sanitation, and the fines that could be incurred for breaking these laws. The leaflet was sent to different organizations and was also taken by NGO and DPHE workers who read it to householders in the villages to motivate them to build sanitary latrines.

Video Film

A UNICEF video film — Pani - O - Paribesh was widely shown to local leaders and government officials, DPHE tubewell mechanics, and NGO workers, FWVs and FWAs, and during Thana and Union level seminars. It helped to give people a better understanding of the need for good sanitation and personal hygiene so that they could motivate villagers to change their habits.

Demonstration Latrines

Demonstration latrines were built outside DPHE Thana offices to show the wide variety of low cost homemade and waterseal latrines that people could build for themselves. Each school was also required to build demonstration latrines.

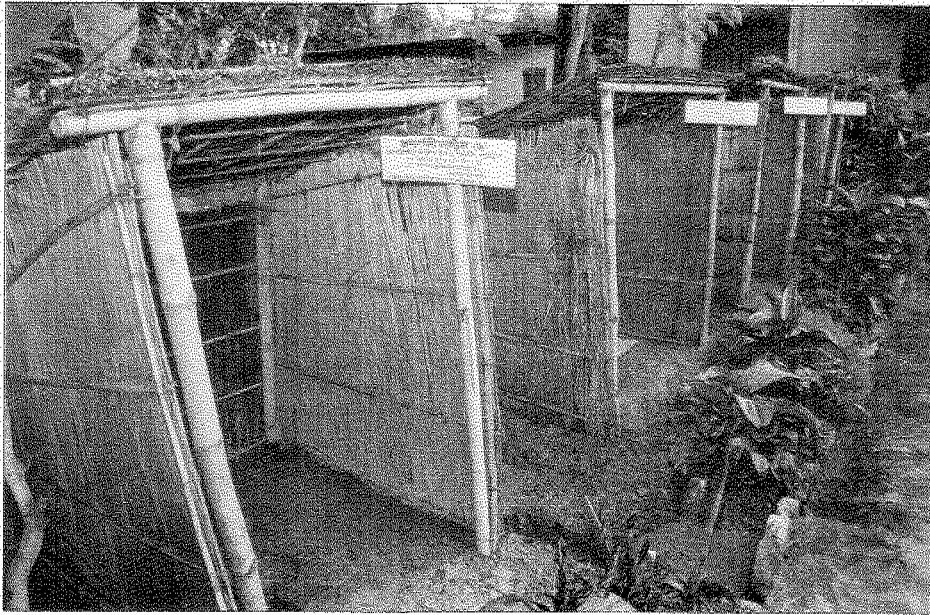


Photo: Shamsuddin Ahmed

Affordable Technology

Demonstration units in DPHE Thana office showing a range of low cost sanitary latrine options.

Affordable Technology

Although rich villagers may build elaborate pucca latrines, a hygienic latrine need not be expensive. A one slab one ring latrine, which is suitable for the stable soil formation in the project area, costs taka 125, and is within the budget of many village families. A homemade pit latrine is even cheaper and can often be made from materials available around the home, and with no cash expenditure.

The homemade pit latrine is a traditional technology that brings hygienic sanitation within the reach of everyone, even in a poor country like Bangladesh.

Workers in Barisal actually found it easier to persuade poor families to adopt the new hygienic latrines. Richer village families often wanted the status of a pucca latrine but were less interested in whether the latrine was hygienic. They would postpone building a hygienic latrine until they could build a pucca superstructure, and even then might dispose of the excreta unhygienically into a pond or river.

Poverty is not a Constraint

Hygienic sanitation and good personal hygiene need not be expensive. A homemade pit latrine can often be made with materials found around the home and no cash at all. Ash from cooking fires can be used to clean hands after defecation, and tubewell water is readily available.

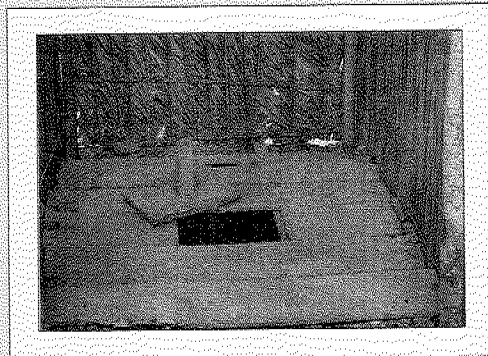


Photo: Shamsuddin Ahmed



Monitoring Progress

The different organizations involved in the campaign divided up the areas in Barisal district and then monitored progress to see where extra work was needed.

Thana Level Monitoring

The Thana was divided into different areas and Thana officials were given responsibility to monitor the school activities in each area. They made random visits to schools in their designated areas to see if demonstration latrines had been built, and if school meetings had been held.

Progress Forms

Progress forms made it easier to see which areas had high latrine coverage and which areas needed more motivation work. Progress forms were given to all organizations that helped to motivate people to change their sanitation habits.

Continued Monitoring

A 1992 WHO-DPHE-UNICEF study showed that it is important to ensure that people dig new pits when the old latrine pits fill up. Otherwise people may return to open defecation or modify their latrines so that they drain into ditches and open water in an unsanitary way.

One or two years after latrines have been built, workers need to return to the villages to reinforce the message of good sanitation and personal hygiene, and remind people of the necessity of building a new pit when the old one gets filled up.



Photo: Shamsuddin Ahmed

Sanitation Laws

Barisal, like other parts of the coastal belt in Bangladesh, has long had a high death toll caused by diarrhoeal disease. It is also an area where there is a tradition of placing hanging latrines over water, polluting the surface water and spreading disease.

During the 1980s, there was an attempt to get rid of hanging latrines in Barisal, but it was not a success. Many unhygienic latrines were destroyed, but too little attention was paid to showing people how to build new hygienic latrines and to explaining the need for good hygiene and sanitation. Afterwards, the villagers just rebuilt their old unsanitary latrines.

It was clear that sustainable sanitation reform could not be achieved just by enforcing the sanitation law, and that motivation was even more important. During the present sanitation campaign, there was a much greater emphasis placed on mobilising all sectors of society, as well as, giving information about the benefits of good sanitation and hygiene, and providing technical help in latrine building. In addition to this, the existing sanitation laws of Bangladesh were used to support the campaign.

The leaflet from the District Commissioner informed people about the sanitation laws and the fines for breaking them, and homeowners who had the financial means to build sanitary latrines but refused to do so, were fined for not complying with the law. In one Thana an ex-Union Chairman was made an example. He had an unsanitary pucca latrine, which drained into an open pit behind his house. A case was filed against him and he was fined taka 500, and had to rebuild his latrine to make it hygienic.