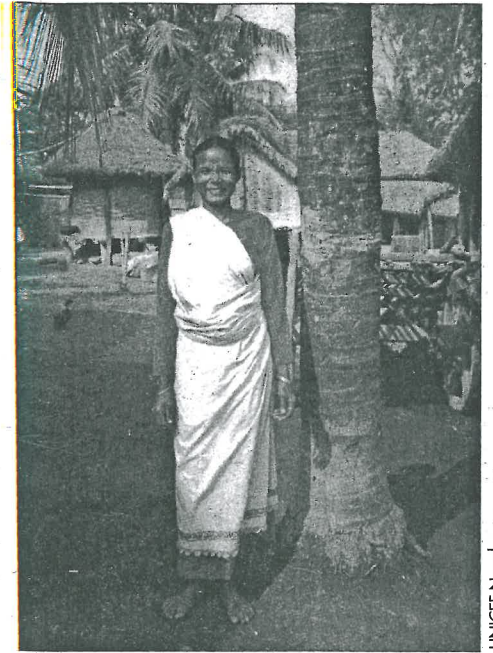


# Towards Empowerment: Women Mobilizers in the Community Water Supply and Sanitation Programme in Nepal

Dr. Krishna Mahapatra, Project Officer for Sanitation, WES Section UNICEF/  
Nepal Country Office, Kathmandu, Nepal

**P**hoolmati Rajbanshi belongs to an ethnic group of a small village in the Jhapa district in the Eastern Development Region of Nepal. She is a Sanitation Motivator of her ward and coordinates the sanitation activities of 44 *sevikas* (women volunteers) attached to some 22-23 tap-stands in 160 households in the ward. As a motivator, she interacts with the other women, disseminating and promoting messages designed to improve hygiene and sanitation. She conducts cluster meet-

ings enabling women to assess and jointly attempt to find solutions to the problems and constraints associated with health and hygiene. Other issues important to women are also discussed. Phoolmati records the gradual improvements in hygiene and sanitation, behavioural practices, construction, adoption and maintenance of facilities in the households through information received in simple pictorial formats from the *sevikas*. This information is submitted every month to a Women Worker or



Phoolmati Rajbanshi

UNICEF Nepal








the Water Supply and Sanitation Technician (WSST) who comes from the District Sanitation Cell.

A new world opened when Phoolmati was selected by her community as a 'Motivator' and a member of the User's Committee in the water supply and environmental sanitation programme implemented in her village two years ago. The District Water Supply Office (DWSO) implements this programme in collaboration with UNICEF. This was a new phenomenon; it was the first time women were consulted and involved in a programme dominated by men's decisions, in spite of it being a woman's domain.

Participating in meetings along with men was a new experience for Phoolmati. It allowed her to express her opinion and seek the opinion of other women on issues that were important and within her capacity to improve, like health and hygiene. It was an eye opener to participate in training programmes and learn about the disease transmission cycle and understand the 'germ' concept. Being a Rajbanshi, an ethnic group, cleanliness is ingrained in her traditional beliefs and values, and practiced to avoid the wrath of the village deity. The scientific explanation of a 'germ' theory strengthened her belief. It

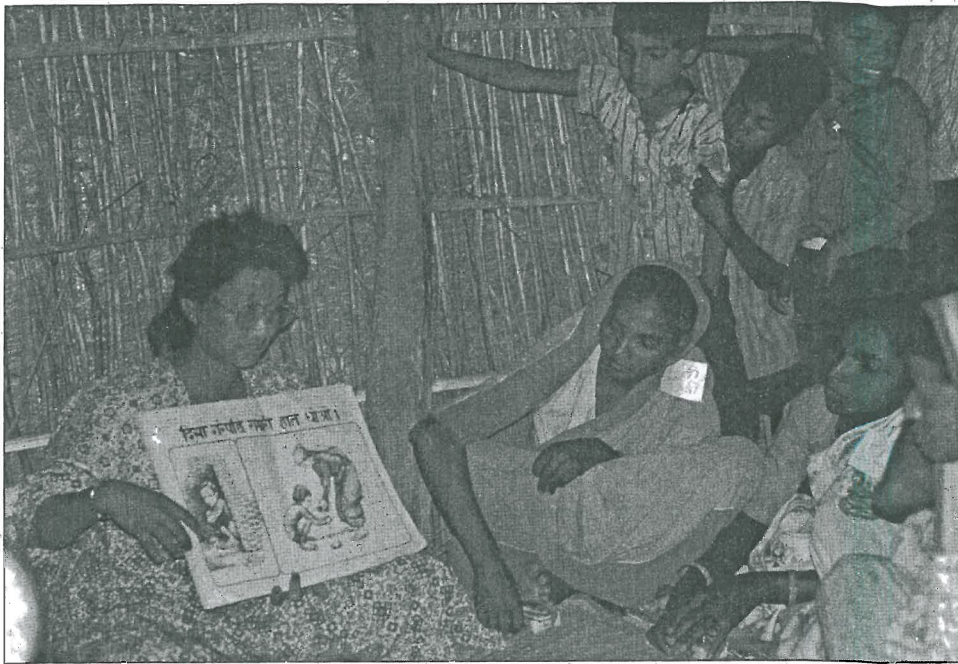
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Training Photograph

was also a learning experience to discover, through the participants and resource people of the training programmes and her visits to other district and regions, the problems and situations faced in other areas.

For Phoolmati, as for many participants of the training and exchange visit, it was the first time they had travelled so far from their village. Husbands or fathers of the participants often accompanied them on these programmes, which was a sign of community and family support for the changing role of women.

Today Phoolmati runs an adult literacy class in her community. As part of the sanitation committee, she manages, with a revolving fund set up jointly by the DWSO and community contributions, the manufacturing of rings and platforms required for constructing latrines.

The remuneration received from these efforts, although meagre, supplements her family income. She has new confidence due to the recognition of her capacity and capabilities. Now she has plans, so many plans, to improve her economic and social situation. She is joined in this by other women of her village for whom she is a trend-setter. This significant change deserves recognition. Not only are women involved in the

programme but their personality, mind and thoughts are developing through the opportunity.

Safe water is a priority need of the villages. To get it, the villagers have had to form User's Committees, composed of men and women or all women. The community, with help from the User's Committees, learns to understand and assess their situation and needs through a 'PRA' process facilitated by DSWO or NGOs. They can then plan their re-

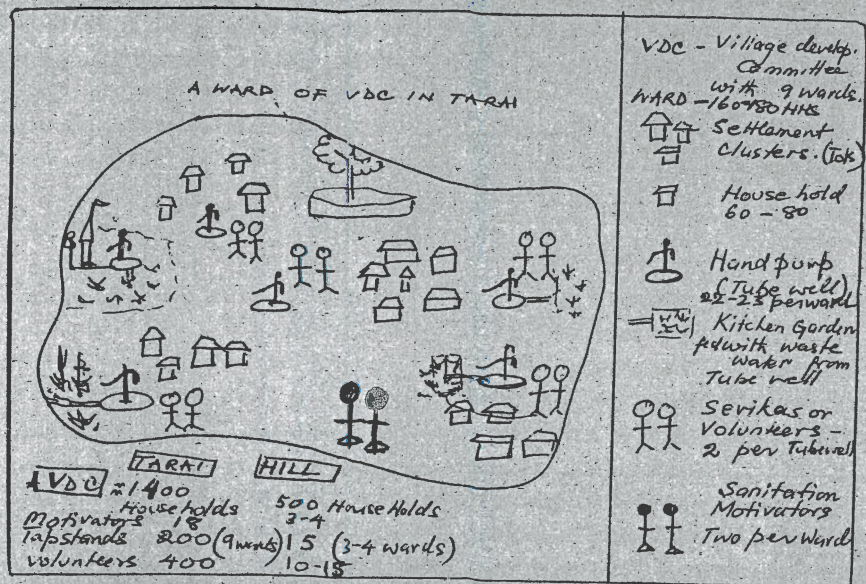
quirements and their contribution, and request support from the District authorities. This community-centred approach of CWSS requires involvement of the women during the planning and implementation stages of the water supply programme. They must manage the hygiene, sanitation condition and maintenance of the water supply.

As members of User's Committees and as sanitation volunteers & motivators, women like Phoolmati, find forums in which to interact and express their views. They are trained on the programme process and technology by Women Workers from the District Sanitation Cell and the WSSTs who camp in their villages during the project implementation period. Resource people from the regional and central level also provide specialized inputs. The women participate in exchange visits, supported by DWSO and UNICEF, to other programme areas to share experiences.

Respecting tradition and customs, women workers are reaching other women. Women Workers at the district level coordinate the activities of women motivators who in turn facilitate the work of the village sevikas. Regular contact through door to door visits, 'Tol Baithaks' (cluster meetings) and aware-

*continued on page 18*

**MAP 1 Result of the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Process**



■ **Women Mobilizers in the CWSS Programme in Nepal**, from page 13

ness campaigns keep the women mobilizers motivated to continue trying to instill attitudinal and behavioural changes. The gradually improving village situation, appreciation of their effort by the community and occasional visits by higher officials and others is their only reward. While Women Workers are part of DWSO staff, the motiva-

tors and volunteers are community representatives. The motivators receive a small monthly remuneration of US \$4 from DWSO during the project implementation period, normally only one – two years.

Currently, in the UNICEF supported CWSS programmes, the 33 districts of the Hills and Terai of Eastern and Cen-

tral Development Regions of Nepal, have 120 sanitation Women Workers, 618 sanitation motivators and 7,981 sevikas or volunteers reaching more than 150,923 households and women regularly. This large team of women representatives receives intensive training at the village level and some at district level. They are provided with kits of Information, Education and Commu-

**The CWSS programme recognizes and ensures women's participation through institutionalization of their roles in planning, site and design selection, sanitation promotion, monitoring and evaluation.**

Key Monitoring Areas	Indicators	Channels*
Community Organization & Management	* Formation of UCs/Sanitation Committees/Women Members * Women Motivators Selected, Appointed, Trained & Functioning	DEs/WSSTs/WWs AEs/UCs/ Motivators
Communication	* People Covered by Campaigns/Trainings/Household Visits/Tol Baithaks' * IEC materials disseminated/in use.	Better awareness regarding sanitation resulting in behavioural changes
Better awareness regarding sanitation resulting in behavioural changes	* Improved Quality of Water: Clean tapstands, Safe Handling of Water, Covered Drinking Water * Improved Environmental Sanitation: Latrines constructed/use of Latrines, Garbage Pits, Soakage Pits, Kitchen Gardens * Improved Personal Hygiene: Hand Washing, Body Cleansing, Nail Cutting, etc.	WSSTs/Motivators/ Sevikas/WWs/UCs/ VHWs/SHCs/PHCs

\* = Existing government and village level functionaries

nication materials for self-learning, training and motivating.

The trained women at the village level and the active User's Committees can help to integrate programmes from other sectors, such as Health & Nutrition, Product Credit for Rural Women (PCRW), and Education. Many User's Committees have started literacy classes; one was involved in credit programmes for income generation. However, this is an area that needs strengthening for planned intersectoral collaboration.

The CWSS programme recognizes and ensures women's participation

**Sanitation, Health Education Achievements vs. MPO 1992 - 96 Targets (Thousand users/beneficiaries)**

	MPO Jul 97	MPO Jul 95	Achievements by July 1995						
			DWSS			NRCS Cent.	NEWAH	Total	%
			Cent.	East.	Total				
Household Latrines	175	105	28	39	67	11	17	95	91
Institutional Latrines (200 users per IL)	291	175	18	32	50		1	51	29
Community Awareness	1600	960	46				741	77	



through institutionalization of their roles in planning, site and design selection, sanitation promotion, monitoring and evaluation. The programme monitoring indicators and reporting system make implementors and programme managers accountable for monitoring the role and involvement of women.

Involving women in the programme has produced better results. This has been borne out by systematic studies carried out in project areas with WES programme intervention and women's active involvement compared to areas without such interventions. The results reconfirm the meaningful role that women can play in bringing about changes towards a better quality of life.

A Study on Knowledge, Attitude and Practices Relating to Water and Sanitation (1994) was conducted by New ERA in Eastern and Central Development Regions in areas with and without WES intervention and women's involvement. It showed higher coverage and maintenance of both water supply and sanitation facilities, better hygiene awareness and lower incidence of water and filth-borne diseases in those areas where the intervention was taking place. A Health Education Impact Study of 21 Water Supply and Sanitation Projects throughout Nepal (1995) was carried out by WaterAid in projects supported by UNICEF. It evaluated the impact of health and hygiene education given by women health and sanitation volunteers. A baseline study was conducted before commencement of the project. One year later, at the end of the project, an impact study was conducted among almost all the same household members.

The study's results showed considerable improvement in both the awareness level and sanitation and hygiene behavioural practices, such as washing of hands by mothers, storage and handling of drinking water, personal hygiene, maintenance of water point and construction and use of latrines. Significant improvement was seen in the use of latrines by under five year olds in the Terai, which rose from a baseline figure of 0 percent to 14 percent at the time of evaluation. This was due to the new

awareness among mothers of the danger posed by the faeces of children, traditionally considered harmless! The time saved by women both in the hills and Terai from fetching water was now available for child care and income generation activities.

The evaluation recognized that the significant improvements were due to the greater involvement of users, particularly women, in the project implementation!

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Improvements in the hills were greater than in Terai, where the density of population is much higher and the socioeconomic situation more complex. The status enjoyed by women in the hill communities is also higher than in the Terai.

Nepal's sanitation and hygiene education achievements described in a recent midterm review of MPO 92 - 96 targets in the UNICEF supported programmes are quite encouraging.

National sanitation coverage, assessed in a Nepal Fertility, Family Planning and Health Survey (1991) conducted by the Ministry of Health/Government of Nepal, places the figure at 20 percent. This exceeds the mid-decade goal of 16 percent and the government of Nepal's Eighth Plan goal of 13 percent, suggesting that the 1990 sanitation baseline data was underestimated.

Although there is still a long way to go for universal coverage of sanitation and hygiene education, the trend is posi-

tive and the process encouraging. This is mainly due to women mobilizers, at various levels, giving impetus and direction to the changes in their lives.

In Nepal, a predominantly male dominated society, where women have low status and position, these changes in women's role and responsibilities through the CWSS programme are of great significance. They represent a dramatic leap towards empowerment of women and equity among men and women. The changes also reflect a change in the thinking of men towards women!

The CWSS programme is playing an important role in giving women an opportunity to grow and develop. It provides an opportunity for women to:

- have more time for themselves;
- meet together, talk, listen and be listened to;
- express opinions and learn to question;
- learn and understand new ideas and concepts and enlarge their outlook;
- gain skills in simple technologies that have income generation possibilities;
- analyze needs, desires and ambitions, and give them a doable shape;
- manage their world themselves.

This process is gradually taking root, with support from the encouraging social environment created through the conscious efforts of all the partners involved.

The efforts of women need recognition and facilitation from all concerned to truly empower women. This commitment was made by the WES Sector in Nepal; the government of Nepal and UNICEF have pledged to make it a reality. 