



Village development committees – holistic progress

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THE SPONTANEOUS PARTICIPATION of the targeted community is a pre-requisite for the successful implementation of any development programme. The aim and goal of the WatSan programme cannot be attained by ensuring the participation of only a particular sector of the community. Rather all classes and sectors of the community should be organised and their active participation should be ensured. This is why community approach instead of target group approach is proved to be more effective in successful implementation of WatSan programme. In this case at the village level Village Development Committees (VDC) have been organised by NGO Forum's partners with representatives from all levels and sectors of the concerned village in order to ensure the active participation of the entire community.

The key functions of the VDC is to make adjustment between the existing problems and resources by taking necessary decisions. The VDC sometimes acquires resources from outside in order to solve the village problems. Thus it

ensures the happy atmosphere and an overall development of the village.

But the VDCs are mostly involved in implementing the WatSan programme through community management. Since it is responsible for the overall development of the village, it works to ensure the disease-free environment of the village for the sake of the healthy life of the community people. In 1998, NGO Forum organised 263 VDC.

VDC at Gudaria village

Grameen Manobik Unnayan Sangstha (GRAMAUS) a partner NGO of NGO Forum, has been implementing development programmes in Gudaria village of Fulpur thana in Mymensingh district, Bangladesh. GRAMAUS formed a VDC in 1998 in Gudaria village. The Joint Secretary of the Gudaria VDC, Altaf Hossain, said that GRAMAUS has formed the VDC in an attempt to organise people from all walks of life and to ensure their participation

Table 1. VDC Formation and Orientation

VDC Formation & Orientation					
Region	No. of VDC	Participants			Partner NGO Involved
		Male	Female	Total	
Rajshahi	20	342	167	509	
Jessore	25	339	21	360	
Rangpur	25	308	102	410	
Sylhet	20	287	80	367	
Bogra	16	190	45	235	
Faridpur	20	385	314	699	
Khulna	22	391	113	504	
Dhaka	22	310	145	455	
Mymensingh	20	253	72	325	
Barisal	27	362	79	441	
Chittagong	22	198	132	330	
Comilla	24	261	67	328	
Total:	263	3,626	1,337	4,963	249

Following are some of the experiences of the VDC members

in the implementation of development programme. “We are presently working to improve the safe water and sanitation, and to raise awareness on personal hygiene practice of the village people” says Mr. Hossain.

“The VDC has performed a remarkable role in raising the use of hygienic latrines in the village”, says Parveen, who attends Gudaria College. The VDC has conducted different programmes such as courtyard meeting, discussion in the mosques, and has encouraged the rural people through interpersonal communication to construct and use hygienic latrines. The VDC has been successful in carrying out its motivational programmes due to its system of communicating through the local opinion leaders such as Imams (Religious leader of the Muslim community), school teachers, and local government members. Moreover, they are encouraging people not only on hygienic latrine and safe water use, but also making them aware of the benefits of sending their children to school, plantation, clean environment, various income generating activities and drawbacks of the dowry system and women oppression.

Abdul Jalil, a member of the VDC informed, “100 per cent of the people of Gudaria village, presently use safe water for drinking purpose, and about 60 per cent use safe water in other domestic purpose”. Md. Shafiqul Islam, the Joint Secretary of Gudaria VDC says, “We are working not only on water and sanitation, but also on education, birth control, and plantation.

Ayesha Khatun, a housewife of the Gudaria village reveals, “All members of the VDC are local people. They regularly go to the village houses and talk to all members of the family. They specially emphasize on hygienic WatSan and hygienic practices. As a result, a majority of the village

people, including children now use hygienic latrines, and are more aware of the importance of washing their hands after use”.

Hamida Khatun, another housewife of Gudaria village informs that they do not face a problem regarding the availability of safe water these days. Many tubewells have been installed in the village, and therefore, people do not need to drink water from rivers or ponds. Most families now have sanitary latrines, and very few people use open space for defecation. These are the contribution of the VDC.

VDC at Pahankucha village

The Village Development Committee was established in September 1998. By December 1998 they had achieved almost 100 per cent sanitation coverage in the village. 220 out of the 241 families had installed water-seal latrines. By the end of January 1999 the needs of the remaining 21 families were met, and 6 tubewells were installed so that they had access to safe water. In only four short months the Committee had reached their target and established their vital role in village development.

Palli Unnayan Parishad (PUP) is a partner NGO of NGO Forum working in the Pahankucha village of Comilla. One of their main accomplishments in this village, with regards to community participation was their help in the establishment of the VDC. After talks with PUP, members of the community, 11 men and 4 women, gathered to form a VDC in the month of September 1998. With help and advice from PUP, the VDC conducted a survey to ascertain the situation in the village with regards to water supply and sanitation, and the overall health and development. The

Table 2. Following is the achievement in the sanitation promotion through the effective intervention of the VDCs

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Region	District Covered	Thana Covered	Union Covered	Village Covered	Total Households	Status Before Intervention	Status After Intervention
Rajshahi	4	20	30	55	18,020	13.8%	57.3%
Jessore	5	19	22	36	16,295	23.76%	94%
Rangpur	7	28	38	78	24,697	22%	74.87%
Sylhet	4	19	35	86	15,208	15.7%	47.05%
Bogra	4	14	23	42	14,018	17.34%	60%
Faridpur	5	18	25	48	13,950	17.99%	58.39%
Khulna	3	13	25	59	14,337	18.47%	51.35%
Dhaka	6	19	47	82	20,018	26.10%	42.31%
Mymensingh	6	20	26	49	14,107	8.50%	53.15%
Barisal	6	16	20	64	21,688	20.39%	41%
Chittagong	4	15	27	34	19,550	30.10%	75.31%
Comilla	6	22	33	52	18,459	22.17%	49.96%
Total:	60	223	351	685	210,347	19.71%	59.47%

survey confirmed that only 87 families had hygienic latrines. Based on the information gleaned, the village was divided into two parts, and the VDC set the target date for 100 per cent coverage for December 1998.

The people in Pahankucha had no previous guidelines for ways to improve their situation. They wanted a better life, but had no means to go about it. PUP gave the VDC guidelines for working towards a better future. They were told about family planning, adult literacy, safe water and sanitation, etc. PUP helped by providing sanitary equipment at reasonable prices, and which would have cost a lot more if bought from private producers. They have received credit from PUP, as well as information about health, and other issues. All decisions and projects broached by the VDC, were taken with the help and advice of the PUP officers. It was seen that once the VDC worked in conjunction with the partner NGO, the village participation was greater, and PUP in this instance was able to greater motivate the community for the implementation of NGO Forum's software activities, such as School WatSan Programme, Imam Orientation, Courtyard Meeting, Non-School Going Girls' Orientation, etc. PUP gave them targets to work on, and the VDC happily embraced them with a favour.

Md. Hanif, a member of the Pahankucha VDC, believes, that village participation is also responsible, to a large extent, for the progress they have made in the village. The village people are their neighbors and relatives. Where everyone knows practically everyone else, it is easier to talk to the people, to get them to listen, and participate in the

development programmes. The entire village in their development approach "contributed to help with financial problems, to buy sanitation equipment, extended credit, etc. The VDC sat every month to decide on the state of their programmes, and what it should undertake next". And thus marking a continuous visit and follow-up with the village people the VDC helped in achieving 100 per cent sanitation coverage in Pahankucha.

Conclusion

The VDC members are very enthusiastic about the work they have been doing, their successes, and the issues they plan to tackle in the future. They are proud of the achievements they have made in the safe water and sanitation department, in the remarkably short time. The VDCs are ready to throw themselves wholeheartedly in the attempt to make the people realize the need for safe water, hygienic latrines and overall hygiene practices. They talk to the villagers, and visit all the houses. Their success is due to the fact that they make people realize the need for development.

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