



GSF PROGRAM IN NEPAL

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES 2020



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GLOBAL SANITATION FUND IN NEPAL

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Foreword

UN-Habitat, an Executing Agency of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC)'s Global Sanitation Fund (GSF) Programme had been working with the local communities and people in 19 districts to improve the lives of numbers of people assuring access to improved sanitation and adopt good hygiene practices since 2010. The program focused on better Water, Sanitation and Hygiene with behavior change in each people since a decade. UN-Habitat is executing the GSF Programme in the country through 60 plus implementing partners with 135 grants covering almost 60% of the geographical coverage of 19 districts and attributing 32% of the national commitment. This program mainly focuses on behavior change and strengthening local government capacity and systems for improving the service ladder through local government.

The interventions of the GSF Programme in Nepal reached around 1.2 million households with more than 6 million population directly with access to improved sanitation facilities and behavior change now living in ODF environment attributing to the national target of country ODF. The outcome study conducted in 17 GSF program districts i.e. Bajura, Bardiya, Arghakhanchi, Bhaktapur, Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Bara, Parsa, Rautahat, Sarlahi, Mahottari, Dhanusha, Siraha, Saptari, Sunsari, Morang and Jhapa in 2018 and also previously conducted periodic assessments indicated the sustainability of the claimed results.

A great deal has been achieved over the past 10 years towards the **Sustainable Development Goal 6 as "Ensure access to water and sanitation for all by 2030"** with country ODF as the significant milestone of the sector. The recent Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019 had also endorsed the sustainability of the country ODF with 95% confirming the access and use of improved sanitation facilities.

The Country ODF declaration on September 30, 2019 Nepal had set the history of the sector milestone that paved the path towards the Total Sanitation Movement based on the government endorsed "*Total Sanitation Guideline 2016*". However, the new emerging challenges are on the way for sustaining the ODF focusing on behavior change with system strengthening and capacity enhancement in terms of quality and quantity at all tiers of the government.

The Programme took up the great challenge of Terai region of Nepal since 2014 which was the highly open defecated area in south Asian region with cross boarder sanitation challenges. To achieve the 'last mile' of Nepal's Sanitation Campaign the Programme brought all stakeholder together to work on this challenge with special focus and priority. When country coverage was 62%, Terai was stagnant with only 13% coverage of improved sanitation facilities access. Despite the daunting challenges in Terai, the Programme successfully contributed to accelerating sanitation coverage in 8 districts from 13% to 100% universal coverage in 4 years intervention collectively with government and development partners.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, the Programme supported 192 Health Care Facilities with temporary hand washing stations to promote hand hygiene behavior and assure the availability of facility. Besides, the assessment of WASH status in HCFs, schools and public spaces of the Programme districts was also conducted.

This "Human Interest Stories 2020" is the compilation of GSF interventions and its impacts and cases in respective working districts. The purpose of this publication is to disseminate the case stories, lessons learnt and best practices of the GSF program captured in course of implementation. This compilation provided the platform to assess the modality that worked and didn't work as well as the approaches and impacts of GSF programme that impacted the individual and household level behavior change paving the pathways towards better hygiene behavior and better life in process.

This document includes the contribution of the Programme in behavior change, policy formation & influence, supporting and attributing national sanitation movement, accessing toilet and other sanitation facilities construction campaign in communities reaching households and people, commitment of line ministry (i.e Ministry of Water Supply) to continue the focus through Total Sanitation initiatives, achievements in Menstruation Hygiene Management. In addition, some interviews with pioneer figures who contribute to the sector and the national campaign as champions and program leaders. This compilation aims to be a valuable window towards information, intervention and achievement of GSF programme at individual, community and national level that changed lives for the better though execution.

Numerous personalities of the sector have contributed their knowledge, information and efforts to prepare this document. We are highly grateful to Renu Kshetry for investigating, preparing and compiling these inspiring and thought provoking stories from different corners of the districts. Equally we appreciate the deeds of our District Coordinators and Implementing Partners for providing the information and great action-packed pictures, colleagues from different agencies, government officials and key stakeholders for their valuable inputs and outstanding contribution.

Our entire GSF team is always optimistic and believes that we could set the strong base on changing the paradigm for better WASH in Nepal by focusing on behavior change and strengthening the systems. We appreciate your valuable partnership and eagerly waiting to join hands together for achieving common goals of the sector.

Acronyms

ADB:	Asian Development Bank
DC:	District Coordinator
DCC:	District Coordination Committee
D-WASH-CC:	District Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committee
DWSSM:	Department of Water Supply and Sewerage Management
EA:	Executing Agency
FSM:	Fecal Sludge Management Plan
GSF:	Global Sanitation Fund
HCFs:	Health Care Facilities
HH:	Household
HWS:	Hand Washing Station
ICU:	Intensive-Care Unit
IEC:	Information, Education and Communication
MCMC:	Model Community Management Committee
MHM:	Menstruation Hygiene Management
MHMPA:	Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partners' Alliance
MoE:	Ministry of Education
MoFAGA:	Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration
MoH:	Ministry of Health
MoWCSC:	Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen
MoWS:	Ministry for Water Supply
M-WASH-CC:	Municipality Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committee
NFDN:	National Federation of Disabled Nepal
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
NSHCC:	National Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committee
PDRD:	Provincial Department of Rural Development
PPE:	Personal Protective Equipment
RDT:	Rapid Diagnostic Test
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goals
SHF:	Sanitation and Hygiene Fund
SSDP:	School Sector Development Plan
UN- Habitat:	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
WASH:	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WASH-CC:	WASH Coordination Committees
WHO:	World Health Organization
WSSA:	Water Supply and Sanitation Act
WSSCC:	Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council

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The family members of Musahar community (the most backward Madhesi Dalits) are using common toilets for defecation in Rangeli Municipality of Morang district. **PC:** Binod Sharma

Community toilets: A saving grace for the landless

Lakhani Devi Rishidev 66, lives in a temporary hut which she can now proudly call 'home' in Rangeli Municipality of Morang district, 386 Km east of Kathmandu.

Lakhani has a big family with three sons, two daughter-in-laws and 7 grand-children. Lakhani does not remember ever owning any piece of land. Neither her fore-fathers nor her father ever owned a land. "How could they buy land when they never had enough to feed the family? Saving was beyond imagination," said Lakhani.

Lakhani and 38 other households in this Musahar community, the most backward Madhesi Dalits, have been occupying 'Ailani' land for ages in Rangeli Municipality. 'Ailani' means the land belonging to the government and no one can buy, sale or use it without the permission of the government. Nepal government can reclaim 'Ailani' land anytime for any purpose without having to compensate for the occupiers of the such land.

Two years ago, there was not a single toilet in these temporary households. Adults used to defecate in the open - either in other's field or in the faraway jungle - and children used to defecate in front of the houses. Lakhani said that the number of people falling sick, especially children, had become normal. "Almost every household had at least one children falling sick, especially during the summer and rainy season," she said.

According to UNICEF report, the children under two in the households that practiced open defecation were significantly more likely to be stunted and have diarrhea. Similarly, in households that did not treat drinking water were more likely to have underweight, children of (especially under two-year olds) households that did not have a cleansing agent at their handwashing place were more likely to suffer from fever.

Bishnu Maya Ghimire, Community Sanitation Facilitator of Motherland Women Society, an NGO working on sanitation and hygiene, remembers the place being so dirty with feces and urine everywhere and children playing in the dirt-filled ground. Due to their lack of land, the toilets could not be constructed even when NGOs and other development partners were willing to provide support.

Lakhani remembers having beaten black and blue by the land-owners. "Every time, I was humiliated, berated for being uncivilized and beaten up when caught red-handed defecating in other's land," she said. "I was angry with myself. I did not have a choice but live with humiliation and being treated inhumanely by other people."

She said the word 'hurt' had lost its meaning in her community. But to her, what hurt most is when her children and grandchildren were chased with sticks, thrashed and were made to run

naked in the fields. Neither her husband nor she could do anything to stop it. "I was so angry at our helplessness. Aren't we human?" she questions.

"Our lives were no way better than stray animals," said Lakhani. "What angers me most is that how can the government ignore us - is it because we are poor, Dalits and seen as liability to the government?"

Prakash Sharma, 65, has the similar story to narrate. He has a small family with son, daughter-in-law and a grandson who had all practiced open defecation until two years ago. "Being scolded by high class Brahmin neighbors in the morning was like music to ears for us," said Sharma. Sharma works as a carpenter but his income is not regular.

"I got used to humiliation. When I was in my teenage years, I found it very distressing and I had so much anger towards rich neighbors, landowners and towards the society," he said. "But when you are poor you don't even have the right to be angry anymore."

The government's priority has been to get one toilet per household but the issue of landless and people living in extreme poverty is one of the challenges for sanitation and hygiene campaign. In order to address these problems, ward office with the support from the Municipality and local NGOs came up with the new initiative of building community toilets for Musahar community.

The Municipality provided the land and financial support, material support was provided by local NGOs and one person from each household provided physical labor for three months to build the community toilets.

It was not easy to construct community toilets in the area because the neighbors had filed a case in the court claiming that the land belongs to them.

Earlier, Mandal spent Rs. 211,300 from his pocket to build the toilet and the local community contributed physical labor. His money was later reimbursed by the Municipality. The community worked for three months to build 18 community toilets with the provision of clean drinking water. One toilet is for two or three households and they share the keys. They have made a routine to clean the toilet every day and keep it locked when not in use.

Realising the need for upgrading community toilets in this ward, the ward office has allocated Rs. 315,000 this year, according to Mandal.

Mandal and Mayor of Rangeli Municipality Dilip Agrawal have been successful in getting their proposals passed by the Ministry of Urban Development for the people's housing programme targeted to poor and marginalized community for the construction of 28 new households which possess citizenship certificate out of 33 households in the same place.

"We never thought we would be able to see this in our lives," feels Lakhani, pointing out at her under-construction house. "Each of us know the value of toilets and you can see how we have kept it so clean to our ability."

“ This is the perfect example of partnership between the community, local government and the local partners' coordinator in addressing the issue of sanitation for landless people,” said Ram Chandra Mandal, Chairperson of Ward No. 7, Rangeli Municipality. “The Municipality is also planning to replicate the same system for the landless community. ”



KATHMANDU, Nepal – The Government of Nepal (GoN), Ministry for Water Supply played a crucial role in the country reaching “Open Defecation Free (ODF)” status in 2019. In this exclusive interview with WSSCC, Honorable Minister Bina Magar speaks about the need for Nepal to invest in several water, sanitation and hygiene programmes to ensure safe water, sanitation, hygiene and menstrual health for all and how she sees the Sanitation and Hygiene Fund supporting Nepal in achieving SDG 6.2.

WSSCC: What are the Ministry’s plans to achieve SDG 6.2 - equal access to sanitation and hygiene for all?

Minister: There is no doubt that Nepal has achieved a milestone in the sanitation and hygiene sector with the ODF declaration. Nepal has also declared its intention to achieve total sanitation.

Currently, we are drafting a Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Plan with local governments. This will help us identify the financial and technical resource gaps for the implementation of sanitation and hygiene programmes and will also help determine ways to fill those gaps. Besides that, the Ministry has drafted the Water Supply and Sanitation Act to address any policy-related glitches. The act is in the Parliament and will be endorsed soon.

INTERVIEW

Nepal’s Water Supply Minister commits to sanitation, hygiene and menstrual health for all

WSSCC: What kinds of programmes do you think Nepal needs to achieve SDG 6.2?

Minister: The Constitution of Nepal states that ‘every citizen has the right to access clean drinking water and sanitation’ and sanitation is defined as a fundamental right. The Department of Water Supply and Sewerage Management (DWSSM), which is part of this Ministry, has launched various programmes on water and sanitation through its project offices in all 77 districts. It also has a plan to start various programmes in close coordination with the provincial and local governments. The Ministry has also prioritized menstrual health and hygiene by developing the National Policy on Dignified Menstruation. The final draft of the policy will be made public after incorporating suggestions from concerned stakeholders.

There are, however, various challenges to the timely and effective implementation of these programmes. The Ministry is facing a sectoral financial gap and a lack of sector-wise expertise in order to implement these programs. We see the Sanitation and Hygiene Fund as playing a critical role in helping Nepal to address these gaps.

WSSCC: Though sanitation and hygiene is a human rights issue, it has not been a priority in terms of budgeting and planning. Why do you think is the case?

Minister: Sanitation and hygiene have become a priority since Nepal moved to a federal structure with three tiers of government. All three tiers have prioritized sanitation and hygiene and initiated WASH plans.

WSSCC: What is the allocation of budget, plans and policies to address these challenges?

Minister: The 15th National Plan of Action has vowed to ensure quality services and accessibility of safe and clean drinking water to all and provide sanitation services deemed necessary.

Based on this commitment, the Nepal Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector Development Plan which is currently being developed includes an analysis of the challenges, potential solutions, and the financial and technical aspects of this sector. The Ministry has developed national programmes on proper management of wastewater, faecal sludge management, etc. The Ministry is also exploring the possibility of attracting private sector investment in wastewater and faecal sludge management.

WSSCC: What do you think can be done to raise the profile of sanitation and hygiene at the policy level?

Minister: Sanitation and hygiene involves many stakeholders, and there is a need for a common understanding and effective collaboration and coordination among all these stakeholders. We need to increase capacity and sector expertise as well as develop the institutional framework.

WSSCC: Only approximately 15 percent of women of reproductive age have access to sanitary pads in Nepal. What do you think the government can do to increase the accessibility and affordability of sanitary pads in Nepal?

Minister: The Ministry is concerned about easy accessibility of sanitary pads, especially for women living in remote areas. We will coordinate with stakeholders and generate resources to en-

“The Ministry is concerned about easy accessibility of sanitary pads, especially for women living in remote areas. We will coordinate with stakeholders and generate resources to ensure easy accessibility of sanitary pads to all women for dignified menstruation.”

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The National Policy for Dignified Menstruation has already been drafted under the leadership of MoWS. Similarly, the School Sector Development Plan (2016-2023) has also ensured privacy, menstruation health and sanitation under the health and nutrition heading. The accessibility of sanitary pads is related to poverty as well. Hence, it is very important to provide skill-oriented training sessions that will enhance the income of women living in rural areas. Even though the government has introduced various projects and programmes related to menstrual health and hygiene, these initiatives have not been sustainable.

WSSCC: Now that Nepal has been declared an ODF nation, what is needed to ensure the sustainability of this status?

Minister: Nepal was declared ODF on 30 September 2019. But we still have many challenges to face in order to maintain our ODF status. There has to be proper coordination, collaboration and understanding between & among all three tiers of governments to enable comprehensive development of sanitation and hygiene sector planning that will lead us to total sanitation.

Following the successful declaration of ODF, the government launched its total sanitation campaign as a social movement after endorsing the Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan 2011. But achieving SDG 6.2 will not be that simple and easy. The major challenges are infrastructure, a lack of sector expertise, financial management, the sustainability of services and coordination between the three tiers of the government, and we feel that this is where the Sanitation and Hygiene Fund can help us address those challenges.



Right Honorable Prime Minister K.P Sharma Oli, Honorable Minister Bina Magar (MoWS), Honorable Minister Mohammad Ishtiaq Rai (MoUD) and other high level dignitaries are inaugurating Open Defecation Free (ODF) declaration ceremony dated on September 30, 2019 in Kathmandu.



Women from Bansgadi Municipality of Bardiya district are participating in sanitary pad making training organized by Integrated Development Society-Nepal, an implementing partner of GSF, UN-Habitat program.

PC: Anju Thapa

Training on menstrual hygiene empowers women in Bardiya

Sumitra Tharu, 40, from Laxmipur of Bansgadi-Municipality, Bardiya district, is a skilled artisan to weave 'Dhakiya', a traditional basket made of shrubs popular among the indigenous Tharu community living in west Nepal. But these days, she has perfected the art of sewing as well.

Since the lock-down, Sumitra has been busy sewing tip-top detachable buttons for sanitary pads. She learned to make sanitary pads after the two-day training provided by the Integrated Development Society (IDS) Nepal - an NGO partner of the Global Sanitation Fund (GSF), UN-Habitat.

"This simple and easy-to-make sanitary pad with tip-top buttons is a revolution for me. It made my life so easy," she said. "I don't have to worry about it slipping away and be embarrassed due to stains anymore." Tharu shares that 25 other women from her community who took the training of home-made sanitary pads with her.

Tharu remembers she had to cut short her trip to the market due to the 'unavoidable accidents', but now she feels that she can easily carry extra pair of home-made sanitary pads. Tharu

feels that if only she knew about this skill when she was growing up, life would have been easier. Since she is a grade two drop-out, she was so scared and shaken with fear when she had her first period at the age of 13.

Together with the local government, the GSF, UN-Habitat has been providing orientations on Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (MHM) and practical trainings on sanitary pad making to young women and girls since June 2019. It has conducted nine trainings in each of the two municipalities and two Rural Municipalities of Bardiya. Each training had 45 participants.

The GSF, UN-Habitat started its total sanitation programme as a pilot project for nine months from July 2017, in two Rural Municipalities (RM) - Geruwa RM and Badhaiyatal RM. It expanded its coverage from June 2019 to two additional municipalities - Rajapur and Bansgadi. In total, the total sanitation programme covered 10 Wards. It also covered 11 Wards as follow-up areas. The GSF, UN-Habitat has selected 18 model schools and 43 model communities for total sanitation programme in Bardiya district. MHM is one indicator of total



Women are undertaking orientation about Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Along with sanitary pad making training organized by Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) in Devdaha, Rupendehi of Nepal. **PC:** Bandana Pokhrel

sanitation programme.

After the training, Tika Chaudhary, a female community health volunteer of Geruwa Rural Municipality Ward No. 5, shared that; in her 20 years of career, she did not know how to make sanitary pad on her own. "This might look simple but it will have a huge impact on women living in remote areas and who cannot afford sanitary pads in the market."

Chaudhary also informed that the Municipality has already started the process of purchasing sanitary pad and disposal machines out of Rs. 4 million (US dollar 32,956) that the Municipality has received from the federal government. "MHM has become one of our priorities and we have allocated budget for trainings for women in the community and in schools so that they can be self-reliant on environment-friendly sanitary pad."

Sushma Chaudhary, Deputy Mayor of Banggadi Municipality, said that they realised the need for MHM orientation and practical trainings to women after seeing the impact it made on the local community.



Participants are exhibiting locally made sanitary pad after completion of the training organized by Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) in Devdaha of Rupendehi district. **PC:** Bandana Pokhrel.

"After the interaction with the community women, we found out that the majority of them had suffered from infection during menstruation due to lack of knowledge on MHM," Asha Thapa, Area Coordinator of IDS-Nepal shared. "We found huge improvement regarding menstrual hygiene among the women and girls after MHM trainings and sanitary pad making training and we have been receiving information that it has been very beneficial to many girls and women especially during the lockdown."

These days, Tharu also train other women, especially her female relatives, who do not feel comfortable attending training about sewing their own sanitary pad. She also sold few pieces of sanitary pad during exhibition and got plenty of attention from the people.

Besides, the GSF, UN-Habitat has formed 135 MHM concern groups in nine districts - Jhapa, Sunsari, Arghakhanchi, Saptari, Siraha, Rautahat, Nuwakot, Bara and Bardiya. The MHM concern group conducts panel discussions and create awareness on 'cleanliness, gender-friendly toilet, reusable pad making training and proper disposal of pad' at the local level.

The MHM concern group also conducts training to adolescent girls, teachers, female community health volunteers from different community /schools. The MHM concern group also assists on disseminating messages through special campaigns during MHM day on May 28 and also contributes on cluster level programme by sharing their experiences.

Durga Nepal, WASH officer at the GSF-UN-Habitat, informed that in order to reach out to the larger mass in its 16 coverage districts across the country, they are developing IEC materials and radio jingles based on MHM which will be aired through local FM radio stations.

Besides, the GSF, UN-Habitat has also selected health facility centres from 50 working municipalities and Rural Municipalities to provide sanitary pads to health facility centres as COVID-19 response.

"Since infrastructure is the biggest challenge, we will continue to engage with the community people, teachers and local representatives to develop MHM-friendly toilets in schools, government offices and public spaces," said Nepal.

The GSF, UN-Habitat provides technical assistance to the local governments on preparing WASH plan and strategy and support collecting data on household sanitation situation which helps the local governments to allocate budget and prioritise budget accordingly.

"This year, we have allocated Rs. 2 million (US dollar 16,478) to build MHM-friendly toilets in community schools as per the need," said Deputy Mayor Chaudhary. "We will improvise our plans and strategies so that we can provide better MHM facilities in the community and schools."



Sumitra Tharu inhabitant at Laxmipur is sewing a sanitary pad at her home in Bangsadi Municipality of Badiya district. PC: Abhishek Tharu.

GSF, UN-Habitat is used digital platform for raising awareness on hand hygiene



Women from Bishya tole, representing the total sanitation model community are practicing hand hygiene behavior in Badimalika Municipality of Bajura district from Sudoorpaschim Province.
PC: Tara Bahadur Khati

Thirty two-year-old Bhim Thapa, a Global Sanitation Fund (GSF), UN-Habitat volunteer, starts his day by calling his friends, relatives, school teachers to find out latest information about the COVID-19 disease (COVID-19) situation in the neighbouring wards and in Badimalika Municipality-6.

Bhim is one of the 48 volunteers and majority of them are teachers whose main responsibility is to create awareness about hand washing with soap, maintaining hygiene and sanitation and maintaining physical and social distance to protect them from COVID-19.

Before the cases of COVID-19 were reported in Nepal, Bhim was busy leading a mass awareness campaign on hand washing with soap and installation of hand washing stations among many indicators in each household as a part of total sanitation campaign implemented by the GSF, UN-Habitat. In that short period of time, 33 out of 36 households have separate hand washing stations. They constructed hand washing stations from readily available materials during lockdown such as buckets, old chairs and mugs etc. Thus, GSF, UN-Habitat has announced Ward No. 6 of Bishya tole as total sanitation model community as it fulfilled basic criteria on sanitation and hygiene.

“Earlier, most of the people from my community mocked us when we told them about the importance of hand washing with soap,” said Bhim. “Some of them did not use to wash their hands even after using the toilet but later they got used to it and started washing hand with soap and water.”

Bhim said that there was a feeling that the local community members were doing us a ‘favour’ by asking them to wash their hands with soap and water. “We used a strategic move by creating awareness to the students who made huge impact on their families,” said Bhim.

Bhim makes sure that he gets all the information about the status of COVID-19 and hand washing and hygiene situation in his community through mobiles and landline phones. “Since we all know each other and we, as volunteers act as vigilantes, we could help prevent the spread of the disease.”

Tara Bahadur Khati, District Coordinator of GSF, UN-Habitat, said that in order to strengthen the digital information system, the project has prepared a comprehensive reporting format for every ward and Municipality. “The reporting format covers contact details of responsible agencies, focal persons at the local level, number of people in quarantine and their situation, available health care facilities, number of medical professionals and available equipment and travel history and health conditions of each returnees and list of beneficiaries of relief distribution.”

Though Badimalika Municipality has received 40 returnees in a month’s time and two are in isolation centre, Bajura has not seen a single case of infection till the time this report was prepared. Rapid Diagnostic Test(RDT) has been done on 134 and all

of them are negative. There are 17 health desks, three isolation centres with 17 beds and 11 quarantine centres. In Bajura, there are 16 locals who have symptoms of cough and are in self-quarantine. In Badimalika alone, there are two quarantine centres in two schools with the capacity of 100 and 10 beds each.

Padam Baduwal, Mayor of Badimalika Municipality, said that each ward has designated COVID-19 information centre and various organisations such as UN-Habitat, Suhaara and Seto Gurans have mobilised their social mobilisers to create awareness and also to collect data. "We are consolidating all the information provided by different organisations and it will help us to take further actions accordingly," said Baduwal. "UN-Habitat has planned to support us by preparing pamphlets and Information and Educational Communication(IEC) materials on preventive measures putting more focus on health care facilities and in other public places."

Baduwal feels that it is not fair for the people of Bajura and other hilly districts to rely on the government hospital at Dhangadi which is 312 Km away. "We have been doing our level best but god forbid if the number of positive cases shot up, then available Personal Protective Equipment and masks will not be enough." The Municipality has also used two local FM stations to air public service announcements in local Khas language to create awareness on hand washing with soap water and maintaining social and physical distance etc.



A girl is participating in a hand washing campaign, jointly initiated by Badimalika Municipality of Bajura and GSF, UN-Habitat program during the COVID- 19 period. **PC:** Tara Bahadur Khatri



Dhan Dani has met the major indicators of total sanitation at his home. He constructed toilets, hand washing platforms, managed safe drinking water and practiced hand hygiene behavior in Badimalika Municipality of Bajura district. **PC:** Tara Khatri

GSF, UN-Habitat has started campaigns in creating mass awareness on washing hand with soap and other hygiene measure. "We are planning to reach out to 275,514 households which are at high risk due to porous borders and influx of migrant workers returning from India. For this, we are airing public service announcements in local languages on local FM stations," said Sudha Shrestha, Chief Technical Advisor, GSF, UN-Habitat." For this, we are supporting local governments in airing public service announcements in local languages on local FM stations and preparing IEC materials for health care facilities and public offices."

Baduwal also informed that Municipality will be focusing on relaying messages for handwashing as key precautionary measures and total sanitation to prevent such pandemics. Besides, he also informed about municipalities plan for safe return of the stranded workers along highways.

"I have already circulated to each ward officials to ensure that if any locals from this Municipality are reported of being stranded anywhere on the highway, then immediate action for their safe travel and testing is arranged immediately," said Baduwal.

Profile

Chandra Bahadur KC The man with a mission

Nepal was declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) nation in September 2019, thanks to Mr Chandra Bahadur KC who made it possible with his charismatic leadership and with strong support from the partners. KC, former Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Water Supply (MoWS) and Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council's member, is a name to reckon with in declaring Nepal as ODF nation in September 2019.

When Mr KC became the chairperson of National Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committee as a joint secretary at MoWS, he prepared a team with all sector actors to push for a last mile. KC played a pivotal role in giving a further push which was needed to achieve a last mile. The ODF coverage had remained stagnant at 99.02 % from December 2018.

Born 58 years ago in Parbat district, 261 Km away from Kathmandu, KC was one of the lucky children to pursue his education and travel all over the country while growing up, thanks to his father's successful career in the government. KC excelled at his studies and bagged a scholarship for engineering in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). He returned from there with a Master's degree in Civil Engineering with specialization in Water Supply and Sewerage in 1986 and joined the civil service and worked on sewerage system construction and management.

Interestingly, Government of Nepal had a programme dedicated to water supply but sanitation was not a priority to be considered as an area to invest as a programme even though there was the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage (DWSS). He was assigned to work in rural water supply project which is far from his area of specialization. However, he did not lose hope to work in his area of specialization in sanitation and continued to work in the DWSS and contributed a lot in this area. He started from an individual level by digging a pit for a toilet and setting an example in rural areas where he was posted and slowly encouraging government offices to follow suit and later he got all stakeholder's involvement to plan and executive district water and sanitation plans.



Rendezvous with ODF

In 1986, when he was posted in Rolpa which is located in 306 Km west of Kathmandu, a remote district in western Nepal, he was appalled to see the universal practice of open defecation. "There was not even a single toilet, not even in government offices," recalled KC. "Fields and nearby bushes were used as toilets."

When travelling in the field for project work, KC dug a pit and started using it as a toilet for his staff which was constructed with labour contribution from all his staff members in district office. It became his first step towards ODF campaign even though he never dreamt about it at that time. Later, Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Support Programme (RWSSSP), under the assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), tried to incorporate toilet construction in the Water Supply and Support (WSS) projects.

As a part of the programme, RWSSSP emphasized the active participation of stakeholders at all levels to increase the feeling of ownership through water supply users' committee. The approach had been developed to involve villagers in the planning and implementation of water supply and sanitation programme and to maximize the proper use of local resources and facilities and also to improve sanitation in the community. The programme made it mandatory for the members of water supply users' committee to build toilets.

This is when KC realised that the community needs to own the programme to sustain it.

“ We thought that having mandatory provisions of building toilet for the members of users’ committee would improve the sanitation. But, it was not sustainable as the number of toilets decreased once the members left the committee or completion of water supply project. ”

First victory

In 2000, long before the national campaign for ODF began, KC led a team to make a small village called Asurpa with 100 households in Dadeldhura district, 771 Km west from Kathmandu, of far western region the ODF area. He succeeded and declared Asurpa as the ODF village in 2000. The programme was supported by the ADB assisted RWSSSP.

The team took a different approach and made an all-women users’ committee. The women were involved from the planning process to execution level. “We felt women bear the brunt due to lack of sanitation and involving women would yield best results and it proved right,” he shared. Apart from that, the village level multi-sector actors’ involvement in the process also helped better result.

Their work was not only appreciated and recognized locally and nationally but got also grabbed a global attention. Two women from that committee and a district WS staff were invited to attend the Second World Water Forum held in the Hague in 2000 where they presented a documentary.

“This achievement helped me to dream,” he said. “Then, I made it a mission to atleast make one village ODF in every district that I cover.”

Step towards policies

From 2002- 2009, when he was a town project manager in Small Town Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Lekhanath Municipality of Kaski district which is 180 Km west of Kathmandu, he ensured that the office provides enough technical support to work on sanitation in 16 districts of the western region.

Though Kaski district had comparatively high toilet coverage of 85% as it was a tourist destination, it was only 15% in Lekhnath Municipality. Kaski district became the first district to be ODF in 2011.

“We realised that bringing change in the mindset of the public was important to achieve our target,” said KC. “We realised that spending the whole year’s budget alone would not be enough. So, we came up with a different strategy of creating awareness on benefits of sanitation.”

Then came the Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan (SHMP) 2011 which became a crucial roadmap to achieving an Open Defecation Free(ODF) Nepal later in 2019. “The master plan included lessons learnt by the sanitation experts faced on the ground since 2000 like sector wise approach, no subsidy plan and well-planned targeted awareness campaign, well set procedure of ODF declaration approval, multi-sectoral coordination,” he said.

GSF, UN-Habitat’s support

When Nepal was facing glitches in moving forward especially in case of poverty, landlessness, unwilling especially in urban areas etc, the Global Sanitation Fund (GSF) support to Government of Nepal from 2010 helped gain significant progress in the most challenging eight Terai districts of Nepal.

“The GSF, UN-Habitat’s sector wise approach helped to make remarkable contribution in scaling up the national sanitation campaign,” shared KC. “GSF helped in ODF declaration in 17 districts and its involvement in reaching the last mile was very important.”

Push for the last mile

In April 2019, KC became the chairperson of the National Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committee (NSHCC) comprised of secretaries of seven ministries who are the signatories of SHMP 2011. The NSHCC is a multi-sectoral platform led by the Government of Nepal which provides strategic guidance to the stakeholders to enhance the capacity of district/village/municipal WASH Coordination Committees at municipal (urban and rural) and at district level to achieve total sanitation by 2021. He brought in all the sector actors together and coordinated with all the line ministries to stick to a new deadline of September 30, 2019 and achieve it at any cost. The NSHCC convinced Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers to make it a national agenda and conveyed the message it to all the line ministries to make it a priority programme.

He also became the member secretary of the National Sanitation Health Steering Committee, the apex body of the government on sanitation, which actually set the date of September 30, 2019 to declare ODF. Nepal had missed the first deadline of eliminating open defecation by providing access to toilets and proper sanitation by 2017. One of the reasons behind missing the target was due to the 2015 earthquake.

“We decided to double our efforts and activities to meet the new deadline,” he said. “We then divided the work among various national and international development partners and the government to tackle the issue.”

A new beginning

Nepal achieved its ODF target in September 30, 2019.

“We have achieved the target, which was once perceived as impossible, an embarrassing topic and not even acknowledged as a problem,” KC said proudly. “ODF Nepal achievement is not the end point but the starting point towards achieving SDG 6 commitment of Nepal.”



Peer-to-peer sharing accelerates sanitation campaign in Cambodia

His Excellency Meng Try, Secretary of State, Ministry of Rural Development, Cambodia during his recent visit to Nepal said that implementation strategies that Nepal adopted during Open Defecation Free (ODF) campaign can be lessons learned to accelerate Cambodia's ODF campaign.

The 18-member delegates from Cambodia under the leadership of H.E. Meng Try, visited Nepal from January 21- 25, 2020 in a peer-to-peer sharing learning exchange on how Nepal declared ODF in all 756 local units of 77 districts in September 2019. This exchange facilitated peer-to-peer sharing of experiences on coordinating large-scale sanitation and hygiene campaigns involving government staff from Nepal and Cambodia.

The delegation had representation from the Ministry of Rural Development, officials from Prey Veng and Kampong Chhnang provinces and Commune council and representatives of development partners such as SNV, WaterAid and representatives of Plan International which is an executive agency of Cambodia Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Improvement Program (CRSHIP). H.E. Try said that the visit has helped to understand how the political commitment, multi-stakeholders, and community partnership along with proper planning backed by enough financial and technical resources could be strategy that Cambodia could adopt to accelerate the remaining 28% of the ODF coverage in rural areas of Cambodia.

The exchange helped political leaders and civil servants at national, provincial, district, and commune levels from Cambodia to gain insights on how Nepal's sanitation campaign was mobilized and coordinated. During the visit, delegates were able to learn about sector policies & strategies, institutional arrangements, sector financing, planning, monitoring, and review and capacity building of various stakeholders involved in the sanitation campaign.

In Cambodia, access to sanitation rate in the rural area is around 72 % and the government has planned that the five priority provinces will be ODF by 2023. Cambodia has planned to declare all 25 province ODF by 2025.

The peer-to-peer sharing of experience was conducted in Nepal because the Government of Nepal led the country-wide sanitation and hygiene campaign which accelerated sanitation coverage from 40 % in 2011 to nearly 100 % in 2019. Similarly, Nepal was successful in spearheading a breakthrough in ending open defecation by accelerating the sanitation coverage in Terai, southern low land region, from an average of 13% in 2013 to 99.5% by mid-2019. The Ministry of Water Supply termed eight districts of Terai as the most challenging districts due to poverty, landlessness, unwillingness and other reasons such as culture and habits.

“Since we have issues with the poverty and after visiting communities in Terai which were the most difficult to cover and understand the strategies they implemented; we will prepare plan based on our learning here and will disseminate it with representatives from all 25 provinces through a workshop,” said H.E. Try. The Cambodia team committed that these lessons will be used in supporting provincial and district ODF planning.

The delegates visited four Terai districts for sanitation to learn about how the coalitions were build and supported among local leaders, leveraging local finance and implementing community-level behavior change initiatives through local leaders for sanitation and hygiene campaign.

The team visited Dhyangri village of Kamal Rural Municipality of Jhapa district-306 Km east of Nepal where they could learn about how Rural Municipalities prepared sector policies and strategies.

Cambodia is also facing similar challenges as that of Nepal of reaching out to the ultra-poor. The delegates found government’s initiative of providing material support to ultra-household and no subsidy plan for the others very effective. Similarly, the delegates interacted with the communities and found out individuals involvement in providing land as a donation and materials with a lower cost at the local level, provision of matching funds from the Rural Municipalities (former Village Development Committees) to support poor households and community-saving groups provide loans for household latrine construction in low-interest rate very interesting.

Ramakant Dawadi joint secretary of Ministry of Water Supply and National Health and Sanitation Coordination Committee (NHSCC)’s chair provided an overview of how Nepal achieved

ODF despite various challenges such as earthquake, poverty, local elections and state restructuring. He termed the government’s commitment and priority to ODF campaign, resource allocation, well-coordinated multi-stakeholders’ engagement and aggressive media campaigning and community ownership as key component of the ODF campaign success.

Sharing the strategy for pushing the last mile, Sudha Shrestha, GSF Manager/UN-HABITAT said that achieving ODF in most challenging eight districts of Terai region was possible after rigorous effort on making local communities and local governments own the campaign and mobilizing all government entities and community organization and individuals as front line actors, volunteers and champions for the cause.

The team also visited the Dalit community in Jilebia Mode of Agnisayar Krishnasarban Rural Municipality of Saptari which was the first ODF declared Rural Municipality (RM) of Province 2. The team interacted with the members of RM WASH Coordination Committee and tried to find out how RM prioritises for budget allocation and community participation for ODF sustainability and total sanitation. Highlighting the work of community-level behavior change initiatives by the women, Jogeswor Khadka, focal person of DWASH CC said that the credit goes to all the women who were actively involved in planning and implementing the process.

After the visit, the delegation expressed commitment to strengthen its National Sanitation and Hygiene Policy through the technical working group for Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene.



The team also visited Tharu Basti in Siraha district-262 Km east of Kathmandu, where the micro cooperatives played a crucial role in supporting the community in providing credit to the members to construct permanent toilets with the double pit in 1 percent interest rate.

Rotha Chin, Director of Provincial Department of Rural Development (PDRD), Kampong Chhnang Province said that even though they have 5-year plan and 3-year rolling WASH plan in place but they have realised that provincial governments need to allocate budget and align all the WASH plans with provincial-level WASH plans bringing in all the stakeholders to achieve ODF goal in stipulated time.

In Nepal, all municipalities, Rural Municipalities, and ward offices allocate 30 % of the budget for social development which includes WASH and the budget is used for WASH activities as per the demand and need. Bed Nath Sah, Mayor of Golbazaar Municipality explained about the planning, monitoring and review process for sanitation programme also handed over the plan of action to the MWASH CC to the Cambodian team.

Dr. Sayteng Lon, Chief of Department of Rural Health Care, Ministry of Rural Development, Cambodia said that they have the similar system of WASH committees at Provincial, Commune and village level but Nepal also has district level WASH committee and they found out that each committee are very dedicated to transforming plan and policies into outcome.

Ty Ung, Deputy Director of the Provincial Department of Rural Development (PDRD) said that it was very impressive to see the commitment of local government and allocating budget for WASH activities and the roles of the communities especially that of women is highly commendable.

According to a study by UNHABITAT, Nepal still has come challenges regarding ODF sustainability especially in the case of landless, ultra-poor and unwilling people, Cambodia's experience of having "Leaving No One Behind Latrine Standard Procedure" in place might prove beneficial to Nepal.

Rafael Norberto Catalla, Team Leader, CRSHIP said that Cambodia is slow to reach ODF status but the way it is being done, ODF will most likely be sustainable. "We have a standard format for all the toilets and have been successful in convincing communities to build permanent toilets with the provision of twin pits."

Catalla said that this will be cost-effective in the long run and ODF will be sustainable whereas there is a likelihood that communities might leave using toilets if they don't find a solution to fecal sludge management in case of the single pit toilet.





Sabitri Nepal and her husband are washing hands with soap and water to prevent from COVID-19 in Changu Narayan Municipality of Bhaktapur district. **PC:** Bidur Nepal

Community close watch system keeps COVID-19 at bay

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted countries around the world and Nepal is no exception. Like rest of the developed countries, Nepal too is exploring ways to control the outbreak. Nepal has also launched a community close-watch system as an innovative avenue for distance communication as a tool to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The World Health Organisation has urged countries to find, isolate, test and treat all cases of COVID-19 and trace every contact to check the spread of the disease. Even though Nepal has less number of cases reported till now, it is at high risk due to porous border with India and China. In order to address the problem, the UN-Habitat, an executive agency for Global Sanitation Fund, launched a three-month community close-watch system in 16 districts of Nepal from April since lockdown. The districts are Arghakhanchi, Bara, Bardiya, Bajura, Bhaktapur, Dhanusa, Jhapa, Mahottari, Morang, Nuwakot, Parsa, Rautahat, Saptari, Sarlahi, Siraha and Sunsari.

The community close-watch system is done through mobiles and telephones where the volunteers will collect information on four major areas - a) health information focusing on COVID-19, b) hand washing and sanitation, c) hygiene and cleanliness and d) WASH information. These information collected will feed into database at central level which will be analysed and verified and then will be forwarded to the local governments (municipalities and Rural Municipalities) to help them formulate necessary policies and strategies on hand washing, hygiene and sanitation.

“With this community close-watch system, we are hopeful that it will increase monitoring capacity of the local governments to fight COVID-19 or any other outbreaks and it will be beneficial for continuing promotion of activities through distance communication and promotion of total sanitation campaign through WASH messaging,” said Rajesh Manandhar, Water and Sanitation Coordinator at the GSF, UN-Habitat.

One month survey shows that, of the 16 districts, 17% of the households in Bajura district reported of having members with COVID symptoms followed by 101 households with COVID symptoms in Mahottari while 5% households each with COVID

The GSF, UN-Habitat has mobilized 1,037 volunteers and 201 total sanitation facilitators, 18 implementing partner staffs, 18 local government coordinators and 14 district coordinators who reached out to 18,886 households and a total of 42,825 messages on hand washing, hygiene and sanitation were delivered in a period of one month. It is estimated to reach out to 104,000 households in next three months through mass communication and distance messaging.

symptom in Saptari and Rautahat districts. Similarly, a majority of households in 16 districts are responding well to current crisis by staying at home but in Parsa district, 21 % households reported that situation is getting worse by reaching the respondent again who reported some issues in responding to the current crisis followed by Siraha district with 12 % households.

The survey shows that a majority of households (81%-100%) reported of having knowledge that hand washing is crucial to fight against COVID-19. It also shows that 100 % households in Nuwakot and Arghakhanchi districts reported that they are practicing hand washing in current crisis, followed by Bardiya (97%) and Dhanusa (96%) districts.

Similarly, 100% households in Nuwakot district were doing their best to teach all the members of their family to wash their hands 20 times a day. Similarly, in Bajura, 51% households reported to have been trying their best to educate their family members to wash their hands 20 times a day while 49% households reported of encouraging their family members but not all members are practicing.

The survey shows that in Siraha, 10% of the households do not have hand washing facility followed by Parsa district where 8% households do not have hand washing facility.

The survey also shows that 100% households in Bhaktapur and Nuwakot districts do not need distance messaging for hand washing and toilet use. In Morang district, 1,805 out of 6,343 households reported the need for distance messaging for hand washing and toilet use. Similarly, in Parsa district, 1,307 households out of 2,566 households reached by distance communication reported the need for distance messaging for hand washing and toilet use.

"This community close watch survey will provide us an actual data on handwashing behavior, sanitation and hygiene which will provide us an insight on the hygiene and sanitation situation and will also be crucial for designing further interventions to fight COVID and other outbreaks," said Manadhar.

This communication platform helps to accelerate previous model of communication such as person-to-person communication (door-to-door visits, mass meetings, mass triggering) which has been halted due to lock down, through messaging via mobile devices while maintaining social distance. This mode of communication provides a platform to trigger positive WASH behavior linking with COVID-19 and continue practice in future.

This community close-watch system has also helped to bring the implementing body (local bodies in most cases) closer to the public in this lockdown scenario. Sixty-year old Sabitri Nepal from Changu Narayan Municipality of Ward No. 8 could not stop sobbing over the phone when Menuka Thapa, a Total Sanitation Worker, called her to ask questions. She has a severe backache problem and has not been able to visit the hospital for her treatment. She lives with her husband and has been in locked in her house.

"Nobody ever called us to find out how we are doing," Sabitri told Thapa. "Today, I feel as if the Municipality cares about us and is concerned about our wellbeing. That is why these questions are being asked and information about how to stay safe from COVID-19 is being shared."

Sabitri told Thapa that she knew about hand washing with soap and staying home was crucial for prevention from COVID but she did not take it seriously. "But after you called, I have been religiously following hand washing with soap, hygiene and sanitation and maintaining physical distance while going for grocery shopping and it felt more 'official'."

Sudha Shrestha, Chief Technical Advisor of GSF, UN-Habitat said, "This is not a survey but the communication and messaging system during this lockdown which we intend to continue beyond the disease as well. The collected information will be updated and analysed and will be incorporated to the local governments' information system for further intervention or mitigation plan."

Besides, if any cases of COVID-19 are reported during the survey, then the District Coordinator (DC) will reconfirm the information with Total Sanitation Facilitator and will be further verified by the DC by calling the members of household individually. Once the information is verified, the DC will notify the household information to Female Community Health Workers Volunteers and to the Municipality for further actions.

"We are working towards ensuring that hand washing, hygiene and sanitation shall always be practiced to prevent us from being infected, not only during COVID-19," said Shrestha. "It should be a norm and we did not want lockdown to deter our ongoing campaign on sanitation and hygiene."



A grand-daughter is instructing her grandmother to wash hands properly with soap and water in Harion Municipality of Sarlahi district. **PC:** Bidhya Poudel.

GSF, UN-Habitat reaches out to differently abled in fighting against COVID-19

Ram Kumar Sah, 27, of Iswarpur Municipality, Ward No. 3 in Bhaktipur, Sarlahi, is physically disabled with foot injuries. As he lives 365 kilometres east of capital Kathmandu, Sah has never got the opportunity to learn the nitty-gritty of hygiene and sanitation.

He never realised that hand washing was important to maintain personal hygiene. "Whenever there was availability of water, I used to wash it but I never thought it was mandatory," he said.

Things, however, changed when Manoj Kumar Sah, Municipal Coordinator of Bagmati Welfare Society Nepal (BWSN), an implementing partner of the Global Sanitation Fund (GSF)-UN-Habitat for total sanitation campaign, visited Sah's house in a door to door campaign and taught him the basics of hand washing in March.

"I have learnt that the hand washing with soap is important to avoid infection of COVID-19. The total sanitation facilitator taught me about cleaning hands with soap," said Sah. Now, he frequently washes his hands before every meal, after using toilet and in every available situation. "Earlier, I did not have the habit of washing hand regularly and hardly practiced it," he further said. "These days, I make sure that all members of my family wash their hands regularly and I guess washing hand will become our habits now onwards."

The BWSN has reached out to five more differently-able persons in the same community and have plans to focus on these groups for hand washing campaign.

"We have realised that in most cases, disable people along with pregnant women, nursing mothers and elderly people get ignored during pandemic. So, we make sure that they are well-informed about the benefits of washing hand and to prevent themselves from COVID-19," said Dipendra Thakur, District Coordinator of the GSF, UN-Habitat. In Sarlahi, training young children to wash their hands with soap has been effective in reaching out to the elderly people in the family.

The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council has supported the GSF, UN-Habitat and the BWSN to launch the total sanitation campaign in 16 wards of Hariaun Municipality, Iswarpur Municipality and Baswariya Rural Municipality of Sarlahi district from February 2020.

The GSF, UN-Habitat has also been reaching out to the households having members with disability to encourage them to construct ramps from locally-available materials for the toilets. "Few of them have expressed happiness about the suggestions for the temporary ramp construction and we are hopeful that they will construct it soon," said Sah.

During the lockdown period from March 22 until now, the GSF, UN-Habitat has reached out to 11,381 people of 16 wards of Sarlahi district for hand washing campaign with key messages on prevention of COVID-19 with support from the local representatives. The door to door campaign for washing hand was launched during the second phase in early March. The staffs of implementing partners and volunteers have started follow-up to the individual households through phones. A total of 187 hand-

washing platforms have been constructed during the lock down period.

The GSF, UN-Habitat has also deployed volunteers for distance messaging through mobiles and telephones to create mass awareness on steps of hand washing, hygiene and sanitation management.

The message of hand washing practice by following the World Health Organisation's (WHO) guidelines as well as the message on COVID-19 was incorporated in the campaign. "As the WHO



Ram Kumar Sah is following 6 steps of hand washing as instructed by Total Sanitation Facilitator from GSF, UN Habitat program in Isworpur Municipality of Sarlahi. **PC:** Manoj Sah

has recommended that hand hygiene is critical to prevent human to human transmission of COVID-19, we have strictly adopted it while implementing our programmes," said Thakur.

The hand washing campaign continued in full speed despite the lockdown, as the local government got actively involved and supported the campaign. "The local government's involvement made it easier to reach out to the locals even during the lockdown," said Thakur. "We reached out to the locals through the local FM radios and public announcements."

The hand washing campaign initiated by the GSF, UN-Habitat was formally launched by the Chief Administrative Officer of Hariaun Municipality in Sarlahi district.

"The support we have received in preventing COVID-19 through hand washing campaign under total sanitation from GSF, UN-Habitat and BSWN is commendable during this crisis because the timely intervention has saved from huge loss," said Ganesh Prasad Prasai, Mayor of Hariaun Municipality. "It has helped us to reach out to the most vulnerable group through it awareness campaign on hand washing and sanitation through mobile communication and we have seen huge improvement in the handwashing behavior and sanitation among the locals."

Apart from the mass awareness programmes, the GSF, UN-Habitat has also reached out to 1,423 households in Sarlahi in April through distance messaging under the Community Close Watch system. Out of 1,423 households, 287 households were provided series of distance messaging on hand washing and toilet use. The GSF, UN-Habitat launched the Community Close Watch system as an innovative avenue for distance communication as a tool to prevent the spread of COVID-19 from April.

"While we all are exploring ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we have made maximum utilization of this lockdown period by intensifying our programmes through distance communication regarding personal and household level sanitation," said Rajesh Manandher, Water and Sanitation officer at the GSF, UN-Habitat. "The newly constructed hand washing platforms and drying racks are the results of this initiative."

Thakur informed that after the intensified awareness campaign on hand washing, there is an increase in hand washing practices and has also helped in the awareness about toilet cleanliness, benefits of handwashing and drying racks platforms in the community.

Kumar Bhandari, Program Coordinator of the BWSN, said that the fear of COVID-19 played a positive role in creating awareness on the importance of hand washing.

The implementing partner also supported the local government for the data collection regarding COVID-19 and hygiene situation, distribution of soap, mask and relief to the daily wage workers and poor households who are badly affected by the lockdown.



A hand washing station and dish drying rack at Sukumbasi tole of Rajapur Municipality of Bardiya district. **PC:** Anju Thapa

Hand washing practice keeps COVID-19 at bay

Just like the rest of World, Nepal too has taken precautionary and preventive measures to stop spreading of Coronavirus by announcing nationwide lockdown from 23rd March till further notice which involves long-route buses to be halted, non-essential services to be shut and international flights to and from Tribhuvan International Airport stopped from March 22nd. The Government also sealed the border with India and China from March 22.

In Nepal, the number of COVID-19 patients to date is reported as 3 with 1 patient already recovered but the health officials expressed concern that there might be more but has remain untested.

However, at a time when the world is focusing on hand washing is one of key elements to ward off COVID-19, some of the communities in the far-west region of Nepal have already been practicing hand washing religiously and adopting it as a part of life.

Forty-seven years old, a primary school teacher of Nepal Rastriya High School Phaghu Tharu of Ward No. 5 of Banggadi Municipality, Bardiya (532 Km west of Kathmandu) said that 96 households of the community is very much prepared for any kind of hygiene-related disease. Tharu's along with other 95 households have separate hand washing stations. "We have already suffered a lot due to Malaria which was the result of lack of preparedness on hygiene and sanitation in the past but we have now realised its importance and have ensured that we strictly adhere to it," said Tharu who is also a member of Laxmanpur Model Community Management Committee.

Tharu said that the biggest problem they faced was unmanaged piped water at homes and lack of proper channels for the disposal of wastewater which became a breeding place for mosquitoes. "Every summer we used to live in terror due to Malaria and there were plenty of cases reported of malaria-infected each member of the households and the communities had to step in to feed and take care of them."

Now things have changed for the better. His village has become a model community and they have ensured that there would be no hygiene-related cases reported in their community. "Hand washing might sound basic but we have realised the impact of it in our lives and we are trying to make it as a part of our lives and we are getting there," said Tharu.

Around 30% of the 97 households did not have cemented water pipe until last year but after Banggadi Municipality-WASH Committee's intervention with GSF, UN-Habitat support, all households of ward No. 5 of having cemented platforms for dish washing and hand washing facilities in place. The awareness programs too played a crucial role in the behavior change of the communities.

Phaghu Tharu belongs to an educated family where his wife is a Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) health worker

who has played an important role in creating awareness to the locals on the importance of handwashing for the last 10 years. "My family is educated but the rest of the communities struggled in adopting it as a part of their lives," informed Tharu. The Ward No. 5 of Banggadi Municipality has 96 households out of which around 65 households belong to the Tharu community- an indigenous nationalities group.

Tharu said that their movement for hygiene started two decades ago when there used to be regular meetings for community forest conservation. "We got an opportunity to hold dialogues with the people from different community and that helped us to understand that tradition of constructing pigsty and live-stock shed in front of the house was not hygienic."

"Besides handwashing with soap after use of toilet and collecting manure was not practiced earlier but later with the help sanitation campaign by GSF and Municipality, we were able to see the direct link between sickness and hygiene," said Tharu. The model community has improved live-stock sheds at the back-

yard of the house, cleanliness of kitchen has been maintained and 92 households use a gas stove instead of wood for cooking and every household has constructed handwashing facilities with soap in their toilets as well near taps. They have also set up a place to dry out kitchen utensils. Every household has a toilet facility with a safely managed sanitation facility.

Laxmipur Model Community Management Committee (MCMC) has the representation of 11 members and there are six sub-committees; Toilet Upgrading Management Committee(TUMC), Drinking Water and Dish drying rack Management Committee, Dishwashing Platforms and Hand washing Station Management Committee, Food, Hygiene and Kitchen Management Committee, Household and Environment Committee and Personal Hygiene and Menstrual Hygiene Management Committee. The MCMC meeting takes place once a month and sub-committee meetings take place twice a month.

Tara Bahadur Khati, District Coordinator of GSF, UN-Habitat said handwashing is the topmost index of the total sanitation and it has been involved in promoting more hygienic practices in the community since 2017.



Phagu Tharu is washing his hands at a recently constructed hand washing station at his home in Banggadi Municipality of Bardiya district. **PC:** Sangita Tharu.

GSF, UN-Habitat started its total sanitation program from July 2017 for nine months in two Rural Municipalities (RM)- Geruwa RM and Badhaiyatal RM as a pilot project and it expanded its coverage from June 2019 to two municipalities- Rajupur and Banggadi. In total it has the coverage of 10 wards of both two municipalities and two Rural Municipalities. It also covers 11 wards as follow-up areas. GSF, UN-Habitat has selected 18 model schools for total sanitation and 43 model communities for total sanitation campaign. A total of 1980 hand washing stations have been constructed in all 10 wards of two municipalities and two Rural Municipalities so far.

"We have been working closely with the municipalities and ward offices to ensure that the local communities, schools, and public offices strictly follow few rules of hand washing," said Khati. "The individual and community's hygiene practice and behavior have improved a lot over the years and drastic decrease in malaria-related infection and deaths is one of the examples of the improved situation."

The key rules for handwashing are to keep water resource clean and safe and to stop dirt contamination, to wash hand after use of the toilet, wash hands and legs after work in the field and home surrounding, to wash hand and legs after cleaning shed/hut cleaning of animals, to wash dish separately, after touching insecticide and pesticide and to cultivate the culture of sanitation to stop contamination of bacteria, virus, etc.

Shalikram Adhikary, Mayor of Bansgadi Municipality said that the Municipality is strictly following its total sanitation strategy plan 2016- 2020 and had already issued directives in each government offices, public hospitals, post office, etc long before the COVID-19 pandemic was announced. "Development of Hygiene and Sanitation Code of Conduct and its effective implementation will ensure the sustainability of total sanitation campaign at the local level," said Adhikary.

Together with the Integrated Development Society-Nepal-a GSF, UN-Habitat partner, every ward and health offices in Badhaiyatal RM, Rajapur RM have installed a sanitation awareness board in front of those offices and prepared strict code of conduct. Similarly, the preparation of both the sanitation awareness board and code of conduct are in process in Geruwa RM and Bansgadi Municipality.

"We had issued directives that every public office should have a handwashing facility with platforms and soaps and this was

strictly followed," said Adhikary. "We have installed around 150 drums with tap & water across various places of the ward. We have started a health desk in four places and 7 health centers have handwashing facilities with soap and sanitizers."

"We are working very closely with various development partners and NGOs to executive our hygiene plans into action and if all the communities become more disciplined and stay home following handwashing guidelines strictly just like these model communities then we are confident that we can prevent COVID-19 from spreading," said Adhikary. "Maintaining proper hygiene and sanitation will definitely stop an outbreak of the infectious disease in the future and it is in our hands to stop that." The Municipality has been reinforcing hand washing and preventive measures of COVID-19 from public service announcements via community radios and also in local languages.



Interview:

Guna Raj Shrestha

Convener for Menstrual Health Management Partner's Alliance

Guna Raj Shrestha, National Convener of Menstrual Health and Hygiene Partners' Alliance in Nepal. **PC:** Guna Raj Shrestha

Gunaraj Shrestha is National Convener of Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partners' Alliance (MHMPA) since 2017. The MHMPA is a loose informal network of various organisations working in the field of sanitation and hygiene. There are 80 members in the group. Shrestha was National Coordinator for Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) from 2013 to 2018.

Can you provide a brief background of MHMPA?

In 2017, the WSSCC was focused on sanitation and hygiene, especially on Open Defecation Free (ODF) Campaign and later, when the sanitation and hygiene shifted from ODF to menstrual hygiene, then the WSSCC also focused on menstrual hygiene. So, we identify two areas: developing human resources for Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHM) and policy formulation.

So, the WSSCC provided Training of Trainers to 70 participants, out of which 50 participants were from Nepal and 20 from Pakistan and 20 more attended as observers. The seven-day residential training was held in Nagarkot. The training was provided by international trainers and team of experts from Geneva. Out of 50 participants from Nepal, 25 participants were from the government ministries, departments and the federal government

and 25 were the representatives of the UN, I/NGOs and media. There were representatives from the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen (MoWCSC), Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Water Supply (MoWS) and Ministry of Health (MoH).

As this team of experts felt the need to continue discussions, the MHMPA formed as an informal network of the participants of this training, in which 80 organisations are represented.

As MHM was not a priority, we had to lobby with the government and the partners to outline the importance of MHM

The main objective of the alliance is to create a knowledge sharing platform of the initiatives of various organisations working in this field. The MHMPA is focused on policy advocacy, human resource development, prepare consolidated plans and programs and provide support to the government on plans and programs. The MHMPA's meeting takes place every two months.

What was the most important thing you felt was necessary then?

During the training, we realised that there was no proper policy on MHM. At that time, the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage Management under MoWS was a leading agency on hygiene and sanitation. After our consistent lobbying, the ministry agreed to draft a policy on MHM and formed a policy drafting

committee with representatives from four line ministries - MoH, MoWCSC, MoE and MoWS - and various experts from development partners, NGOs and other sectors in 2017. I represented the team from the WSSCC and was appointed the Coordinator of this drafting committee. The WSSCC also provided fund to hold meetings. Later, we realised that it is not the issue of hygiene only but more of dignity of a woman. So, we changed the name of the policy to National Policy on Dignified Menstruation. We submitted the draft in six months.

Why the delay in endorsing that draft bill?

When the policy was drafted, it was led by the Ministry of Water Supply along with support from three other line ministries, as it had covered four aspects --education, health, women and WASH. But later, after discussions with the experts, government officials and the MHMPA members, we agreed to approach it as a human rights issue. Thus, it came under the purview of the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen. This transition caused some delay. We are now hopeful that the MoWCSC will table the bill in the parliament and endorsed soon.

How do you think the MHMPA has played a role in creating awareness about MHM at the policy level?

Earlier, all the activities were scattered. But, with the formation of MHMPA, we now know who is doing what and how best we can contribute to make it more effective through concerted intervention by various partners. Today we have become a stronger voice with expertise in MHM.

Why do you think there is a need for increased investment in MHM sector?

Menstrual health and hygiene has a multi-dimensional impact on women and girls and it needs comprehensive effort to establish it as human rights issue related to dignity of women. Besides, it is directly linked with education, health, water supply and hygiene. It costs a lot in order to intervene in these areas. For example, in education, we have to invest in curriculum development, text book and reference materials. It takes research and evidence to develop these educational materials which will have long-term impact on the students as well as teachers. But in the case of informal education which caters to out of school girls and women, we need to organise training, awareness campaign, and develop and distribute IEC materials. All these works need huge investment.

In health, we need to mainstream menstrual health and hygiene into all health-related plans and programmes, as it still not a priority in WASH sector.

We also need investment on building menstruation-friendly toilets in all the schools and public offices. In Nepal, only 15 % women have access to sanitary pads and 85% women rely on used clothes. This unhygienic use of clothes without access to clean water can have long-term impact on the health of women

and girls. So, the government should invest in producing biodegradable and reusable sanitary pads.

How do you think the government and development partners can help to eliminate taboo and stigma associated with menstruation?

As the taboo and stigma are directly linked with culture and religion, we need a long-term strategy. Inclusion of MHM in school level curriculum will have a long-lasting impact on the psyche of the students. Besides, the government's endorsement of 'National Policy on Dignified Menstruation' has also created a favorable environment towards recognizing menstruation as dignity. As for eliminating taboos, the local governments in the west have dismantled around 60% chaugoths. We now have Muluki Criminal Code 2017 that criminalises a practice that forces women to stay in a cow shed during menstruation. Under the law anyone who forces a woman into the cowshed during the period will face three months jail sentence and Rs. 3,000 (US\$ 24) fine.

How do you think we can translate our policies into action?

“ The most important thing is that sanitary pads should be easily accessible and affordable to all the women from age group 9 to 50. It should be listed under essential items just like condom. If condom can be distributed free of cost then why can't sanitary pads be distributed free of cost? If the government can't distribute in free of cost then it should at least make sanitary pads as tax free and to promote local production company to produce affordable and reusable sanitary pads, government should reduce 35 % tax on raw materials for the pads. ”

After two years of regular lobbying with the government, the government plans and policies mentions of providing in free of cost distribution of sanitary pad in the schools. The Government of Nepal has also endorsed Sanitary Pad Distribution and Management Guidelines, 2019 and it has to channel it through the local governments. Now, our focus is to campaign for affordable and accessible sanitary pads for 85 % women who do not have access to it.

Contactless hand washing stations get popular among users in Bardiya

Radha Pokhrel, nursing in-charge at Rajapur Primary Health Care Facility of Rajapur Municipality in Bardiya, 532 Km west of Kathmandu, expressed her happiness after the Global Sanitation Fund (GSF)/UN-Habitat provided an innovative foot-operated hand washing station to the facility.

“This foot-operated hand washing station is very useful for all of us health care workers, patients and visitors during this COVID-19 crisis,” shared Gaha. “Even though we have been promoting hand washing as a preventive tool against COVID-19, the risk was there regarding the spread of the COVID-19 by touching while using tap and soap.” But, she added, “This foot-operated station is very easy to use and it will help to prevent the spread of the COVID-19.”



Deepa Gautam, Vice-chairperson at Badhaiyatal Rural Municipality of Bardiya district inaugurated the contactless hand washing station provided by GSF, UN-Habitat program. **PC:** Tara Bahadur Khati



Shankar Prasad Tharu, Chairperson of District Coordination Committee in Bardiya district, is washing his hands in the contactless hand washing station installed by GSF, UN-Habitat program. **PC:** Tara Bahadur Khati

In Bardiya, the GSF, UN-Habitat has installed eight foot-operated hand washing stations in four palikas (two municipalities and two Rural Municipalities) and one in front of district coordination committee so far. It has also provided each of these palikas with a set of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) package that includes 500 masks, 240 soaps, 102 gloves, 10 liquid soaps, two waste baskets, two buckets and two mugs, 240 sanitary pads and two sets of thick rubber gloves for cleaning.

The unique foot-operated hand washing station has a 500-liter capacity water tank mounted on a fabricated stand along with a wash-basin. It has a liquid soap dispenser as well. Both the tap and liquid soap dispenser are mechanically linked to the pedals fixed at the bottom. Pressing the pedal releases liquid soap and water.

This unique foot-operated hand washing station was manufactured by Prakash Bio-Sand Filter Pvt. Ltd. of Bardiya, a local vendor of the GSF, UN-Habitat. “Earlier, I used to manufacture affordable and environment-friendly bio-sand filters but after COVID pandemic, we came up with this product and it is highly appreciated by local people,” said Kaluram Bishwakarma, proprietor of Bio-Sand Filter Pvt. Ltd. He took the initiative in close consultation with the Eco-concern Pvt. Ltd. when the business went down due to the lockdown.

Bishwakarma's business has increased after the installation of foot-operated hand washing station in Bansgadi Municipality two weeks ago. "The Municipality has shown keen interest to procure more hand washing stations for other public places," he said. "And few INGOs have contacted me to manufacture such hand washing stations for community schools with the reduction of height of hand washing basins."

Shalikram Adhikari, Mayor of Bansgadi Municipality of Bardiya district said that this is the most useful equipment provided by the GSF/UN-Habitat. He said that this equipment is needed for other places as well where more people gather like banks, tax office, Department of Electricity and all health care facilities. "This equipment is useful even after COVID-19, as hand washing can prevent spread of other diseases as well," he further said. "So, I am planning to allocate budget for buying at least three hand washing stations for three major health care facilities immediately."

All the nine hand washing stations in four palikas were installed at place where a large number of people visit for various services.

Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) which is evolving into the Sanitation and Hygiene fund also supports innovation in hygiene, safely managed sanitation and menstrual health. Globally, more than one in three people do not have basic hand washing facilities at home. According to Wateraid, 52 % people in Nepal lack hand washing facilities at home and 54% health care facilities do not have hand washing materials at the point of care.

Shanker Tharu, Chairperson of District Coordination Committee (DCC) Bardiya, said that this innovative hand washing station installed in front of the DDC office has raised interest among the service seekers, health care facilitators and the passersby. The DDC office' meeting hall has been transformed into quarantine center with 26 beds and separate toilets, hand washing facilities for the returnees. The hand washing station is installed in the center surrounded by tax office, infrastructure development office and DCC office where around 150 persons wash their hands every day.

"This has become center of attraction and everybody washes their hands when they see the foot-operated hand washing station just to experience it," said Tharu. "We are getting great reviews from the users and we feel that it should be installed in every health care facility, schools and other public places."

Tara Bahadur Khati, District Coordinator of the GSF, UN-Habitat informed that the foot-operated hand washing stations were

installed at public places with two or three government offices where a large number of people visit for public services.

Not only installing innovative and user-friendly hand washing facilities, the GSF, UN-Habitat has also reached out to 866,309 people in 64 palikas with hand washing and soap promotion campaigns.

"We are planning to provide at least 192 hand washing stations in 64 palikas of our total 16 coverage districts in close coordination with the local governments," said Sudha Shrestha, Acting Chief Technical Advisor of the GSF, UN-Habitat.

The GSF/UN-Habitat, in its preliminary findings of assessment of WASH facilities in 305 Health Care Facilities (HCFs) in 16 GSF coverage districts, 466 hand washing platforms are made available in those facilities.

"But improved hand washing stations can play a crucial role in containing the spread of disease by ruling out direct contact," said Shrestha. "We have already provided such hand washing stations to three health care facilities and plan to reach out to 120 HCFs with WASH facilities soon."



Locals are washing hands in user friendly contactless hand washing station in Bardiya. **PC:** Kaluram Bishwokarma



GSF, UN-Habitat program supports contactless hand washing stations in the District hospital of Arghakhanchi. The visitors and officials wash their hands with soap and water before entering to the hospital. **PC:** Rajan Bhushal.

About 4 % of health care facilities lack proper hand washing facility: Survey

The officials at Arghakhanchi District Hospital in Sandikharka, 460 kilometres west of Kathmandu, had to fill water jar ten times a day when they did not have a proper hand washing station.

Dr. Kapil Gautam, Medical Officer at the Hospital said, "Hand hygiene is the most effective way to prevent infections and especially during this pandemic, every health care providers are at risk of infections while they are treating patients."

The Hospital got one hand washing station (HWS) two days ago from Global Sanitation Fund-UN-Habitat which is being utilized by almost 300 patients and visitors.

“After installing this, even we (frontline health workers) feel secure and this is indeed a huge support to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. said Dr. Gautam”

As per latest preliminary survey of 305 health care facilities (HCFs), about 4 percent of the HCFs in 50 palikas were found to have lacking the proper hand washing facilities. The survey report states that 9 % of HCFs do not have toilet facility and 4 % have toilets but without functionality. The 4% of the HCFs toilet are not functional due to various reasons like pit full, collapse, an outflow of sludge, etc.

The latest preliminary survey of 305 health care facilities (HCFs), including the one mentioned above, was carried out by the Global Sanitation Fund/UN-Habitat. The 'Assessment Report on Status of Health Care Facility' was prepared after the survey conducted in May 2020 in its 16 working districts.

The survey was conducted in hospitals, primary health centres, health posts, basic health care centres and birthing centres. The census-based quantitative survey used closed questions with an objective to assess the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) status of Health Care Facilities (HCFs) in the GSF working areas. The HCF assessment was conducted to identify possible WASH facility gaps.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified lack of sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities as one of the 13 emerging health threats of the next decade.

"This preliminary assessment has helped us find the gaps especially regarding operational and functionality of hand washing and toilet facilities despite having the facilities. This will help us to improve the facilities along with providing 192 hand washing stations in 50 palikas of our total 16 coverage districts," said Sudha Shrestha, acting Chief Technical Advisor of the GSF, UN-Habitat.

In responding to fill the gap on hand washing facility and immediate clinical material support, the GSF, UN-Habitat has provided 11 out of total 30 foot-operated hand washing stations in the

health care facilities in four districts – Arghakhanchi, Bardiya, Bhaktapur and Nuwakot districts. The other remaining were distributed to the municipalities and Rural Municipalities where the large number of people visit for public services.

Further, only 11% of HCFs has the presence of disabled-friendly toilets and 22% of the HCFs are found to have no waste segregation practices. Nonetheless, 65% of the HCFs are practicing regular cleanliness of premises. The survey also found out that the HCFs in the Terai districts of Rautahat, Parsa, Siraha and Dhanusa do not have safe toilets, as they have single pit toilets.

“Since the UN-Habitat is also involved in providing technical support to the concerned palikas in its working areas in planning WASH Guidelines and Sanitation Plan, this survey will help us strengthen our intervention strategy,” said Ms Shrestha.

The survey was conducted through telephone communication utilizing KOBO Collect mobile application due to the lockdown. “We had to resort to telephone communication in close coordination with implementing partners, district coordinators, total sanitation facilitators and volunteers,” said Shrestha.

The survey reports that 87% of the HCFs have allocated separate hand washing facility. Only 1% of the HCFs has an Intensive-Care Unit (ICU) facility and 3% of the isolation wards are allocated for the COVID-19 patients.

In the 305 Health Care Facilities where the study was conducted,

525 hand washing platforms are available in the HCFs, which show good access to hand washing. In some districts such as Nuwakot, Morang and Bhaktapur, they have higher number of health washing facilities (HWFs) in the HCFs whereas Jhapa district has the minimum.

As part of the intervention, apart from providing foot-operated hand washing stations, the GSF, UN-Habitat has also provided a set of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) package that includes 500 masks, 240 soaps, 102 gloves, 10 liquid soaps, 2 waste baskets, 2 buckets and 2 mugs, 240 sanitary pads and 2 sets of thick rubber gloves for cleaning in each of 50 palikas in all 16 working districts.

The study also found out that 45% of the HCFs is not treating the drinking water. The treatment of water includes mainly filtration, chlorination and boiling.

Similarly, out of 305 HCFs, 63% has not addressed the MHM facility, whereas 37% has MHM facility, like pad changing room, pad-bin and the availability of the sanitary pads in the HCFs.

Globally, 1 in 5 health care facilities lack access to basic sanitation services according to the Sanitation and Hygiene Fund.

“This preliminary survey report helps us to be better prepared to combat emerging health threats on time,” said Shrestha. “We will share this report with the concerned local government officials to take urgent action together.”



GSF, UN-Habitat program provides WASH and clinical materials to Menuka Kafle, Chairperson of Kamal Rural Municipality in Jhapa.
PC: Som Acharya



The water treatment plant is installed aiming to manage pure drinking water to service seekers and officials in Kamal Rural Municipality of Jhapa district **PC:** Renu Kshetry

Local people's engagement mitigates climate change impact

Jhapa, Nepal: People in Ward No. 1 of Kamal Rural Municipality had to rely on rusted tube-well water as it did not have clean drinking water. Until few years ago, there used to be cases of diarrhea and dysentery in the community and health professionals termed water pollution as the main reason.

However, the campaign for Open Defecation Free that started in 2017 made the locals aware about the importance of safe drinking water. Locally-made water filters were installed in the households under the campaign, according to Shyam Karki, a local resident. "After the installation of the water filters, the number of locals falling sick has gone down drastically."

There are 123 households in Dhyangritole of the Rural Municipality and 121 of them have filter management system. The Toile Sanitation and Hygiene Committee members visit each household every week to monitor the hygiene and sanitation management.

However, the locals still do not know the percentage of iron in the water, as only 47 households have pure drinking water. The locals still resort to traditional testing methodology - boil water for some time and put neem leaves on it and if it turns black then that water has high iron concentration. "But," said Karki, "Very few households with tube-well water have good quality water for drinking."

"Since access to safe drinking water is one of the prerequisites of total sanitation, we have been educating the locals for the need of locally-made filters," said Binod Prasad Sharma, Global Sanita-

tion Fund (GSF) coordinator for Jhapa and Morang districts. "We have worked closely with the Rural Municipality to ensure that each household has proper filter management system."

According to "Climate, Sanitation and Health", a paper published by the World Health Organisation, the users' engagement and awareness is important to gain their support to bring necessary changes in sanitation. It states that the users belonging to marginalised groups, require information and advice related to links between climate change and sanitation, and the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the decision-making process.

The GSF, UN-Habitat started total sanitation campaign from June 2019 with the coverage of 408 households of Ward numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 and out of which 370 households have filter management system. A total of 225 households have double pit latrines which will control the problem of poor leaching which is symptomatic due to pits prematurely filling in Tarai.

The changing climate pattern had contaminated the groundwater and since these households in Ward No. 1 and 2 rely on groundwater, the level of ground water had also decreased. "Earlier, we used to get water easily but these days the ground water level has gone down so low that we don't get any water," said Karki. "Some of the old tube-wells have dried up and majority of them dried up during summer season. So, we have no other option than to rely on these filters, as they have worked fine for us."

The filter is constructed from locally-available materials like iron or plastic containers, PVC pipes, iron nails, brick, sand, and gravel. This helps remove arsenic, iron and other bacteria from the water and make it safe for drinking. The arsenic and iron is removed by absorption onto the surface of rusted iron nails. Pathogens such as bacteria are removed mostly by physical straining provided by fine sand layer, by attachment to previously removed particles, and, to a less degree, by biological predation occurring in the top few centimeters of the sand. Each filter costs Rs. 3,400 (about US\$ 28).

For those who cannot afford to pay for the locally-manufactured filter, Hygiene and Sanitation Toile Development Committee has requested the Rural Municipality to allocate budget for the poor households to provide plastic drums so that they could use coals, sand and gravel to make home-made filters.

Meanwhile, Kamal Rural Municipality installed 1,000-liter water treatment plants in three community schools and in the premise of the Rural Municipality with support from an NGO a month ago. "Our priority is schools because we have received complaints from the parents and teachers that majority of students fall sick due to polluted water," said Menuka Pokhrel, Chairperson of Kamal Rural Municipality. She informed that in order to address the problem of Ward No. 1 and 2, the Municipality has allocated Rs. 22.5 million for drinking water for the next year.



A local inhabitant is pouring water on bio-sand filter in Gaurigunj Rural Municipality of Jhapa district. **PC:** Gyanu Rajbanshi



All the households in Prakashpur Model Community are using bio-sand filter for safe drinking water. **PC:** Gyanu Rajbanshi

"We are hoping that from next year onwards, we will be able to start drinking water pipes installation in Ward No. 1 and 2 and hopefully the problem of water-borne diseases would be prevented," said Pokharel. "And, I hope the locals would be involved in preserving the water sources and contribute in the mitigation of climate change impact."

The Rural Municipality with the support from GSF, UN-Habitat has prepared total sanitation guideline where safe drinking water and sanitation management is the top most priority.

“We have been educating the locals on not polluting the source of water by constructing leak-proof double pit latrines, use less groundwater and plant more trees,” said Pokhrel.



A Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) is demonstrating hand washing steps to the community people in Gramthan Rural Municipality of Morang district. **PC:** Himanshu Yadav

Hand hygiene and preparedness supports to fight against COVID-19

At a time when Nepal is trying hard to trace the COVID-19 suspects and keep them in isolation, the local governments in Tarai region and in the far west have been struggling to control the influx of returnees at the border with India.

There are eight major transit points with immigration and custom offices between Nepal and India. Besides, there are 39 motorable borders and 150 areas from where people can easily travel between India and Nepal. Nepal government has been heavily criticized for restricting its citizen to enter the country after India announced its lockdown from March 24 and Nepal took similar measure a day before.

Gaurigunj Rural Municipality (RM), Jhapa 459 Km east of Kathmandu, is one of those municipalities which is nearly 5 Km away from the Indian border. The majority of households here belongs to poor and marginalized indigenous groups from Rajbanshi and Dalit communities. And, the majority of these people live under the poverty line and their main source of income is labour migration in India.

Ram Chandra Mishra, WASH Focal Person at the rural Municipality, said that they are very mindful of the fact that these people who have returned home from their job have nowhere to go. So, they have formed a team to investigate these cases individually at the health desk centers and send them for quarantine.

The rural Municipality has formed a 11-member COVID-19 epidemic prevention and control committee under the leadership of Rural Municipality's chairperson including representation of doctors, health professionals, RM officials and representative of total sanitation campaign facilitating agency. Likewise, rapid response team also has been formed including the security personals. Each ward has formed a COVID-19 control and relief distribution committee. "We check their temperature with infrared thermometer and then put them in isolation for 14 days," Mishra said. He informed that they immediately hold a rural Municipality level extended meeting with the representatives of all local political party leaders regarding preparation and have also formed committees at each ward of 15-20 people to ensure that correct information is provided to each households and they strictly follow it.

To date, 99 returnees have self-quarantined for 14 days and 88 have already gone home and 11 are still in quarantine in the health camp. Except for two who had fever for few days, no one has any symptoms of COVID-19. The two patients are also recovering in the isolation ward and their fever had gone down.

Besides all these attempts to prevent the impact of COVID-19, Gauriganj Rural Municipality has tied up with the Global Sanitation Fund/ UN-Habitat to work towards ensuring total sanitation from June 2019.

"We had a challenge of making people understand about the importance of hygiene and sanitation, as they are poor and illiterate," said Mishra. "But, organisations like Birat Community Learning Centers (GSF supported NGOs) helped to install basic concept of handwashing to the communities which has proved a biggest tool in the fight against COVID-19."

The GSF, UN-Habitat program has supported four wards of the rural Municipality and has developed seven model communities for total sanitation. It has the coverage of 340 households in the deprived marginalized community of the rural Municipality. Each house has now constructed hand washing stations with soaps. They also have dustbins and toilets and they are also working to upgrade toilets from single pit to double pits with septic tanks. They have also constructed tube well platform after total sanitation campaign started.

Binod Prasad Sharma, Morang and Jhapa District Coordinator of GSF, UN-Habitat, said that out of total six wards, they have selected only 340 households from the most marginalized, poor and backward community to make it a model community by achieving all indicators of total sanitations from achieving hygiene and sanitation behavior, household sanitation and institutional sanitation.

Despite the difficulty caused due to lockdown, GSF, UN-Habitat has collected phone numbers and updated information of 1400 households of its coverage wards of Jhapa. "We have formed clusters with five-member volunteers representing different communities who support for information collection about the situation of every member of the households via telephone and in places they could easily collect information from their neighborhood maintaining physical distance. These information are shared with the Palika Level COVID-19 Prevention and Control Committee for preventive measures," said Sharma. "Besides we are also disseminating information of total sanitation and monitoring the hygiene and sanitation situation of each households and provide technical inputs through telephone for maintaining it."



Birat Community Learning Center (BCLC), an implementing partner of GSF, UN-Habitat program promotes hand washing behavior among school children in Bhawanipur of Gauriganj Rural Municipality, Jhapa. PC: Dilip Tajpuria.



The members of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committee of Gauriganj Municipality unveil the Total Sanitation Ward Planning Guideline in a function. PC: Dilip Tajpuria.

However, the interventions for advocacy for sustainability of Open Defecation Free campaign, hygiene and sanitation and other strategic support to the rural Municipality and six wards have continued.

Sunita Paswan, Chairperson of Suddhamvhatta Model Community Management Committee, said that even the squatter's poor community who had sought some material support for the construction of toilets from the ward offices earlier had come forward to buy buckets for hand washing. "Some of those who had not taken it seriously earlier had started acting responsibly and have bought buckets and soap," she said. "And, GSF and other organisations provided them tap for the buckets."

Besides, long before the news of COVID-19 started to broadcast, the rural Municipality had installed 11 permanent structures of ceramic water basins and water tanks in six ward offices, one in the rural Municipality's office and in four health posts for hand washing. The rural Municipality constructed a handwashing station with Rs. 16,000 (US\$ 135).

However, after the news of the possible outbreak of COVID-19, the rural Municipality also installed water tanks with taps and soaps in 200 public places, mostly in market areas, junctions, ward offices, bank premises and health posts. Besides that, they also installed eight plastic water tanks with the capacity of 2,500 liters of water and also installed big water tanks with 1,000 liters capacity in major intersections in partnerships with various business houses, banks and cooperatives.

Each ward of Gauriganj Rural Municipality, with the technical support from GSF, UN-Habitat, has also prepared three-year total sanitation strategic plan and has allocated budget for the total sanitation campaign for this year as well.

"We are planning to execute the plan strictly and we cannot even imagine the situation if we had to start from the scratch regarding handwashing to the local communities at this critical period. At least that part has been covered," said Mishra. "Public awareness through public service announcements on preventive measures for COVID-19 through seven mobile vans has been ongoing to reiterate local's hygiene and sanitation practice."



Panelists on 'Periods in Pandemics'

Honorable Minister, Parbat Gurung-Minister for Women, Children and Senior Citizen (MoWCSC), Kunj Raj Joshi, Ministry of Health and Population, Gunaraj Shrestha-MHMPA National Convener, Malvika Subba-Miss Nepal 2002, Shrinkhala Khatiwada- Miss Nepal 2018, Rama Dhakal-President of National Federation of Disabled Nepal, and Youth Icon Latika Maskey Assistant Representative-UNFPA share view on menstruation hygiene management in Nepal. The webinar was organized to mark Menstrual Hygiene Day dated on 28 March, 2020. **PC:** Renu Kshetry

Let's declare Nepal as a country for dignified menstruation: Hon'ble Parbat Minister Gurung

Hon'ble Minister Parbat Gurung for Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen stated that the Government of Nepal is planning to make Nepal a model country for dignified menstruation.

The government is endorsing and implementing policy on comprehensive social development act which will address gender inequality, dignified menstruation, discrimination and gender based violence, Minister Gurung said while addressing a webinar on 'Periods in Pandemic' organized by the Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partners' Alliance (MHMPA) to mark the World Menstrual Hygiene Day.

According to the minister, the National Policy for Dignified Menstrual Hygiene has already been drafted and a comprehensive Social Development Act is being prepared which will be tabled in the parliament soon.

"There has been a huge change in the mindset of the people in far-west where Chhaupadi (practice of banishing women to cattle sheds for five days during menstruation) is still rampant,"

Minister Gurung said, adding, "They are supporting the local governments in dismantling the Chhaugoth and all the local governments are planning to announce their area Chhaupadi free."

The government is hoping that the changes will be seen within a year after the dignified menstrual policy is endorsed at the central level and the local governments implement it, Minister Gurung further said. For this, he said, the Council of Ministers has already endorsed immediate, medium and long-term plans of action to address MHM issues in the country.

For immediate action, the MoWCSC is coordinating with national and international partners and mobilizing local governments to distribute relief packages along with sanitary pad, Minister Gurung said. He also said that this year the government has also allocated budget for free distribution of sanitary pads in the community schools.

In Nepal, only 15 percent of the female adolescents and youths aged 10-24 use sanitary pads and 84 percent use cloth.

Minister Gurung informed that the ministry is also planning to encourage local women entrepreneurs by supporting them in manufacturing bio-degradable sanitary pads at the local level as a part of the President Women Upliftment Programme so that it will be easily accessible.

“ We hope that Nepal will be self-reliant on the bio-degradable and reusable sanitary pads production. ”

Speaking at the webinar, Malvika Subba, Miss Nepal 2002 and Youth Icon, said that the government should make menstrual supplies free of cost just like condoms. “This is every woman’s problem of age group 9 to 50 and it happens every month and women have to pay Rs. 200-300 every month to buy sanitary pads. Therefore, the government should provide sanitary pads for free to all women.”

Guna Raj Shrestha, National Convener of the MHMPA, said that despite a huge demand for sanitary pads, the local factories have been producing only 7 percent of their total capacity due to 35 percent tax on the raw materials. “The government should announce MHM as essential product and should make it tax free, so that 9.3 million Nepali women of age group 9-50 will have easy access to sanitary pads.”

Rama Dhakal, Vice Chairperson of the National Federation of Disabled Nepal, said that women with severe disabilities are the most affected due to lockdown and COVID-19 because they do not have any means to get sanitary pads easily. “Therefore, the government should make it a top priority to reach out to the most vulnerable groups with necessary supplies.”

Latika Maskey Pradhan, Assistant Representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), said that the Menstrual Health supplies should be listed as essential supplies so that the relief packages include them.

“Menstrual health is also a human right and the mindset has to be changed which is only possible through education system and strict implementation of policies on MHM and action plan,” she said. “The government should emphasise on access to information and education regarding MHM to break this silence.”

She said that the UN agencies in Nepal are committed to work closely with the government as well as reaching out to the out of school girls and community to create awareness on MHM.

Miss Nepal 2018, Shrinkhala Khatiwada was of the view that since menstruation does not stop during pandemics and lockdown, availability of menstrual hygiene supplies has become difficult especially for those women and girls who are struggling to meet their daily needs.

“Until and unless we do not address the gender inequality, it is very difficult to break the social norms,” she said, adding, “The government and other development partners should work towards addressing gender inequality along with maintaining menstrual hygiene.”

Periods in Pandemics
कोभीड महामारी: महिला र महिनावारी

DATE: 28th MAY 2020 Thursday
TIME: 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Panelists

- Bina Magar, Cabinet Minister of Ministry of Water Supply
- Parbat Gurung, Cabinet Minister of Ministry of Women & Children
- Latika Maskey, Deputy Country Representative, UNFPA
- Malvika Subba, Miss Nepal 2002 & Youth Icon
- Shrinkhala Khatiwada, Miss Nepal 2018
- Rama Dhakal, Vice Chairperson, NFDN
- Guna Raj Shrestha, National Convener, MHM PA- Rapporteur

Moderator

- Jagadish Kharel, Renown TV Journalist of Image TV

zoom

Profile

Namaste Lal Bhoomi Shrestha,

A strategist behind ODF campaign

Namaste Lal Bhoomi Shrestha, former Senior Sanitation Specialist at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Nepal, heaved a sigh of relief when his dream of declaring Nepal as Open Defecation Free nation actually became a reality on September 30, 2019, after spending 36 years of his life in the Water and Sanitation field.

"I saw a dream and I was convinced that ODF can become a reality even though there were so much doubts from all spheres," says Shrestha. He said he kept moving, garnering support from all stakeholders along the way and finally was able to see his dream turn into reality."

The Government of Nepal recognized his contribution by declaring him a National Hero behind the declaration of ODF. Not only nationally, his contribution was recognized by the Government of Sweden in 2010 by announcing him as Water and Sanitation Hygiene (WASH) Ambassador and in his honor, Swedish Government also published a postage stamp on his name in 2010. Shrestha was able to get a total of Rs 11 crore (approx. US dollar 974000) fund from Swedish National Committee for WASH on his personal capacity in 2005 and 2010. In 2006, UNICEF used this fund to pilot School Led Total Sanitation (SLTS) programme and Model District Concept in Kaski, Chitwan and Tanahun which later became the first, second and third ODF districts in Nepal respectively.

Born in Bandipur of Tanahu, 60-year-old Shrestha had a difficult childhood, full of hardships and struggles. Good at studies and hardworking, Shrestha started his career at the age of 19 becoming a principal of a public school in Bhansar of Tanahu, after graduating. Once, he made students and teachers carry stones to build the infrastructure of the school during weekends. Though others criticized him, he learnt that locals' participation would give them the feeling of ownership.



Encounter with sanitation

His career in the field of sanitation and hygiene started after he joined the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) as a language teacher and cultural informant in 1976. As a part of his job, he sometimes had to travel to remote parts of the country. When he visited Jumla in 1980, he was shocked to see the living condition of the people in one of the remotest parts of the country.

"Jumla at that time was 50 years backward than Kathmandu with inhumane conditions to live in," recalls Shrestha. "Then, I felt if I really want to do something different, then there could be no other place better than Jumla." He then asked for two-year extension to work there.

First acquaintance with sanitation

Though he lived in an office quarter at the district headquarters with domestic help for a year, he later realized that he should move-in with the family in Simkhadha village, which is about 45minute's walk from the headquarters. Within a few months of living with the family, he felt sick, as he had to rely on water from the stream, relive himself on the faraway fields and rely on barley/millet bread with chilly and salt. The doctor asked him to go back to Kathmandu, if he really wanted to live but this became a wake-up call for him. He felt that he could at least try to support in improving the lives of the people by providing safe drinking water in the village.

He then tried to get support from the Zonal Commissioner, District Development Committee Chair, the government officials and the local political leaders. They, however, doubted him as a communist leader. He tried to raise funds using different ways but did not work out. Finally, he convinced the locals to work in the stone mine to earn money to buy water pipes and requested

the UMN to provide technical support from the water source to Simkhada village. This was the turning point in his life. He not only managed to provide safe drinking water to the people in Jumla, but also encouraged them to build toilets without outside support, neither from the government nor the donors.

Involvement of women is key to success

As a sociologist with experience of working in Jumla, he joined the Lutheran World Federation in 1984 as Community Development Officer in Baglung, 270 Km west of Kathmandu. He fondly remembers of how he involved women in the water and sanitation project to make around 20 % contribution through physical labor. In addition, he realized women can teach and share better than men in sanitation and hygiene. The involvement of women in water and sanitation was also the strategy he advocated and followed up greatly later in the ODF campaign as well.

He then joined UNICEF as an Assistant Project Officer and in 30 years of his career he became the Senior sanitation Specialist. During his tenure as a Sanitation Specialist, he and his team played a crucial role in preventing diarrhea which is the leading cause of under-five child mortality and morbidity. He helped to reduce the risks of communicable diseases by increasing access to safe drinking water, promoting sanitation, especially toilets, and continuously and tirelessly motivated people to wash hands with soap.

"In UNICEF, we could reduce the mortality and morbidity numbers drastically through holistic approach such as education, health, nutrition along with access to water, sanitation and hygiene," said Shrestha.

Mantra for success

Shrestha focused on few major events that helped to turn his dream into reality. In 1988, UNICEF followed his strategy of involving women for counseling on hygiene and sanitation by hiring 40 women and deployed them after providing them intensive training. The women trainers identified volunteers/motivators etc. as front line actors and trained them in concept and on the job for sanitation and hygiene promotion. Inspired by UNICEF's initiative, now, all the Water Supply and Sanitation Divisional and Sub Divisional Offices assign women workers. Moreover, the number of female community health volunteers have gone up to 56,000 across the country. This has played an important role in improving the health and sanitation and hygiene status of the communities around the country.

In 1994, the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage (DWSS) took the lead in preparing a sanitation policy with the support from UNICEF focusing primarily on involving women. Nepal and Ghana became the first countries to draft the sanitation policy.

From drafting to seeking political commitment

Since, drafting of policy was not enough, the Government of

Nepal with the support from UNICEF and other likeminded organizations organized a conference in Kathmandu inviting chairpersons of all the 75 districts development committees and the mayors who made political commitment publicly to promote sanitation through the DWSS and the Municipal Association Nepal in 1998.

Similarly, to mark International Year of Sanitation in 2008, the Government of Nepal and the donors like UNICEF, UN-Habitat and WHO and many others organized an event in which all 601 Constituent Assembly members expressed commitment for sanitation along with the Bagmati River Cleaning Campaign. "This publicly made commitment motivated all the concerned stakeholders to speed up the process."

The same year, the Government of Nepal started preparing National Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan (SHMP) based on the commitment of South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN). The lessons learned during those six years in three pilot districts- Chitwan, Kaski and Tanahu were incorporated in National SHMP which was launched in 2011.

All the seven ministries and the National Planning Commission took the ownership of the document which was approved by the cabinet and passed by the office of President of Nepal and transformed its policies into actions.

In 2017, the programme speeded up as a Sanitation social movement.

“ However, our goal of achieving ODF by 2017 pushed back further due to various unavoidable circumstances like earthquake, Terai bandh, flood in Terai, local election and new federal structure. ”

Even then, overcoming all these hurdles, the ODF coverage reached to 95% by 2017."

Shrestha feels that this very pragmatic concept of government leadership, stakeholders partnership and community ownership are the key to ODF campaign's success. The joint coordinated and concerted effort from various stakeholders along with the local bodies played a crucial role in institutionalising the whole process.

"Nepal is committed to achieve SDGs on water and sanitation and in order to achieve that we should focus on basic behavioral build up step by step which will eventually lead to proper use, operation, maintenance and upgradation of sanitation facilities leading to sustainability of ODF," said Shrestha. "Sanitation should be everyone's business. The mantra, says Shrestha, should be 'Let us all think globally and rationally, act nationally and locally and start positively and immediately.'"



Women groups gather together and discuss developing the action plan for total sanitation guidelines in Kispang Rural Municipality of Nuwakot district. **PC:** Renu Kshetry

SLUG: WORLD TOILET DAY

Womens group: Task force to promote sanitation

Sunita Gurung, 31, a mother of three children from Pokharigaun of Ward No. 5 of Kispang Rural Municipality of Nuwakot district of Nepal remembers the open defecation, dirt and filth everywhere when she came to this village after her marriage 13 years ago. Gurung's mother-in-law, an alcoholic, used to defecate in front of the house and mostly in a cattle shed in an animal manner and Gurung had to clean it up. "There were times I could not eat food after cleaning up."

She remembers falling sick constantly due to urine infection and lack of menstrual hygiene. Later, when she went to Trishuli, 16-Km away from her village, she was amazed to see toilets there with running water. Before that, she did not know that toilets could make life that easy.

"Once I got used to, to the new way of life, it became very difficult to again go back to bushes and dispose menstrual clothes openly," said Gurung. After two years, her new born daughter used to fall sick quite often due to filth everywhere. Then she put her foot down to have a toilet in her house to put an end to free flow of fecal waste in front of the house, which had become the breeding place for housefly and mosquito. "After that, for some months, my main job was to convince my husband to build a temporary toilet," she recalls. "Later, he heeded to my constant reminder."

She also convinced her mother-in-law to build a toilet by selling a buffalo in Rs. 13,000 (US \$ 114). She had felt humiliated when

villages used to mock her for her mother-in-law's open defecation in the house. The most difficult part was to change the behavior of her mother-in-law. She had a tough time to convince her mother-in-law to use the toilet and eventually to use the pan.

Getting together for a cause

Gurung is just one of the women in Pokharigaun who is part of the women group formed to promote sanitation in the village. Forty-year-old Kamala Bhatta remembers being a member of Saraswatidevi mother's group when she was only 22, just for the sake of receiving a toilet pan from the NGO. In the beginning, 10 women got together to form a group 15 years ago. Pokharigaun has 54 households - 46 households from indigenous group and the rest Brahmins and Dalits. There are 42 members in the mother's group now.

"Even though I was uneducated and a shy lady, I could not resist the temptation of getting a pan because I had suffered a lot especially during menstruation," recalls Bhatta. "I have encountered so many incidents during the rainy season, I've even been bitten by snakes."

Now, Kispang Rural Municipality has 48 active women groups. The beginning was not easy for women though. They were never invited in any meetings in the village. But few women like Kamala Bhatta and Sunita Gurung started participating in every Village Development Committee level meetings even when they were

not invited. They used to be shut down whenever they raised issues of building toilets and maintaining sanitation and told to mind their own business. "We felt that how come it was not our business, as the reason behind our children constantly falling sick was due to poor sanitation and open defecation," said Gurung. "It was taking toll on every member of our family and they still say it was not our business."

In Nuwakot, Open Defecation Free (ODF) was declared on 12 July 2018 with 100 percent coverage and 64.5 percent new toilets after the campaign was held from November 2017 to May 2018 by Global Sanitation Fund (GSF). GSF/UN Habitat with its local partners, Renaissance Society Nepal and DECON Nepal, provided orientation to capacitate and sensitise communities for safe disposal of excreta and adopt proper hygiene and sanitation behavior. It also encouraged communities to construct 706 new toilets on their own.

A way forward

Now, every household has a toilet. As some have temporary ones, the women groups are encouraging them to make permanent ones offering them financial loan and physical labor if necessary. These previously hesitant women have now become a force to reckon with as far as maintaining sanitation in the village is concerned. They now have another challenge - to change the behavior, especially of elderly people and mentally challenged people, to use toilets and throwing of polythene bags in the open spaces.

The women groups have joined hands with GSF and local government to create awareness on sanitation and hygiene through behavior change communications and have endorsed a work-plan to execute it.

Women groups gather together and discuss developing the action plan for total sanitation guidelines in Kispang Rural Municipality of Nuwakot district. **PC:** Renu Kshetry



Sunita Gurung is sharing her views in a discussion session about the behavioral practice for meeting the total sanitation indicators. **PC:** Renu Kshetry

Maitrai Sharma, GSF District Coordinator, said that the GSF is supporting the government's initiatives to execute and operationalize the total Sanitation Guideline in the GSF working districts through sector coordination and capacity development.

The post-ODF intervention programme is conducted in 11 wards of two Rural Municipalities and one Municipality of Nuwakot which provided a strategic support to move towards total sanitation in Nuwakot by June 2020.



Hand washing become part of life in Dhanusa



Srijana Karki is instructing hand washing behavior to her son as mitigating measures of COVID-19 in Janaknandini Rural Municipality of Dhanusa district. **PC:** Srijana Karki

Hand washing has become a part of life in Dhanusa district of Nepal due to fear of Corona and massive awareness campaigning through distance messaging, community surveillance and mass media. People have started understanding and practicing that Hand washing is the only available option to prevent from pandemic like COVID-19.

Shruti Karna, 35, of Ward No. 2, Mangalpur of Dhanusadham Municipality in Dhanusa, has her own readymade clothing store where customers flock most of the time.

She takes care of her family of six with the earning from the store. As she has young children and old mother-in-law at home, she's quite careful while dealing with her customers. She's extra conscious now after the lifting of the lockdown a week ago. "I am very cautious because I don't want to risk my young children's and my old mother-in-law's life by exposing them to COVID-19 through me."

Almost 30-40 customers visit her store every day. As the bread earner in her family, she can neither close the store nor put herself at risk. Thus, she makes sure every visitor washes hands with soap before entering her store.

"Earlier, it was difficult to convince people to wash their hands," she further shared. "But, I told them that it would protect them and family members from the COVID-19."

She has also installed hand washing facilities at her home by utilizing used jar and installing tap to it and has installed at the gate and in the kitchen and toilet. "I have made it compulsory for my husband to wash his hands with soap after his return from work," she said. "It applies to my children and visitors too."

"I never considered it important before. But I have realised that washing hand can protect us not only from COVID-19 but also from other infectious diseases," said Karna. "This has become a way of life for us especially due to the pandemic," she further said, "I have also encouraged others to follow washing hand and sanitation hygiene strictly."

The Global Sanitation Fund (GSF)/ UN-Habitat started the Total Sanitation Programme (TSP) from February in 14 wards of Dhanusadham Municipality, Laxminiya Rural Municipality and Janaknandani Rural Municipality of Dhanusa. It implemented the programme through Samaj Utthan Yuba Kendra (SUYUK), a local NGO, along with the support from the local governments.

According to Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, jointly prepared by the National Planning Commission and the

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 80.7 % of population has a handwashing facility where water and soap or detergent are present whereas 79.3 % population in Province 2 use hand washing facility with water and soap.

Binod Mahato, Programme Coordinator of SUYUK, said that together with district wash CC members and local governments, the organization intensified the awareness campaign through SMS, mass media, mike-ing via mobilizing vehicles provided by Palikas (local government), that continued even during the lockdown. "We ensured that the myths and misconception circulated through social media was demystified," he said. "Within a month of lockdown, we could see people adapting to the new way of life, installing hand washing facilities."

Govind Subedi, District Coordinator for Dhanusa and Mahottari of the GSF, UN-Habitat, said, "In the last four months, we have intensified distance messaging by mobilizing 13 staffs and 65 volunteers for community surveillance and distance messaging via phone call."

In Dhanusa alone, a total of 194 messages on hand washing, sanitation and COVID-19 prevention were disseminated through SMS from March. Through Facebook, these awareness messages were reached out to 210,000 people in the district. Besides, the Nepal Telecom and NCell circulated messages through ringtones from March 15. In Province 2 alone, the GSF, UN-Habitat has reached out to 33,510 households with the information on COVID-19 and hand washing and hygiene.

According to Min Aryal, Spokesperson at the state-owned Nepal Telecom Company Limited, the NTC felt that reaching out with public service announcements through its 22.4 million subscribers could have a huge impact.

According to MCIS 2019 report, 95.5 % of the households in Province 2 have a telephone (fixed line or mobile phone) and Dhanusa is also one of the districts of Province 2.

Parikchyan Yadav, Ward chair of Dhanusadham Municipality-4, said, "We have realised that after intensifying massive awareness campaign via various means of communications and also through door to door campaign with the support from SUYUK/ GSF, UN-Habitat's total sanitation facilitators and volunteers, we have seen drastic improvement in the lives of people regarding hand washing with soap and sanitation."

Apart from Karna, the awareness campaign has made huge impact on children as young as three-year-old Srijan Karki of Ward No. 4 of Janaknandini Rural Municipality. "My mom taught me to wash my hands with soap," said Srijan.

Just like Karna's family, Srijan's mother Srijana Karki too have made hand washing facilities at her home using old jar. "Earlier,



Shruti Karna washes hands with soap and water after using the toilet in Dhanusadham Municipality of Dhanusa district. GSF, UN-Habitat program disseminates the message of hand washing during 6 critical stages through different media. **PC:** Binod Mahato

we never thought it was important. But now you can see almost every household has constructed their own hand washing facility with soap," she said. "Hand washing with soap has become a part of our life now."

Baleswor Mandal, mayor of Dhanusadham Municipality the fear of corona and massive awareness campaign on handwashing with soap and maintaining physical distance during lock down was a huge success. He said that people are understanding and practicing handwashing as the only available option to prevent pandemic like COVID-19. "From elderly people to children are aware of handwashing with soap and maintain sanitation and hygiene and we have seen that majority of people strictly followed it and made it as a part of life." Mandal however expressed concern that there is a chance that people might slowly return to their previous way of life and give up hand washing, hygiene and stop wearing masks. "Situation has become even more dangerous with the risk of transmission in the community so we are planning to intensify mass media awareness campaign regarding hand hygiene, wearing masks and maintaining physical distance," said Mr Mandal.



The hoarding board with a message of total sanitation indicators is placed in front of Changu Narayan Municipality office of Bhaktapur. **PC:** Renu Kshetry

Public toilets: A boon to ODF sustainability

Seventeen-year-old Prathana Rai was delighted to find a toilet at Muhan Pokhari of Changunaryan Municipality which is 3 Km away from the Municipality on her way back from Nagarkot hiking trails. She frequently comes with her friends from Baneswor in Kathmandu for hiking in Nagarkot trails and honestly shared that she and her friends used to go behind the bushes for answering nature's call number of times despite knowing that it was not safe.

"This is indeed a very good initiative and will not only protect women from any untoward incidents but will also stop polluting the water reservoir and the dense forest nearby," said Rai about the new toilet facility.

At a time when Nepal is facing a challenge over the sustainability of the Open Defecation Free(ODF) programme post ODF declaration in 2018, Changu Narayan Municipality is exploring all possible measures to sustain public toilets. The Municipality has recently completed building three public toilets with two rooms to rent out as shops for commercial purpose in tourists hub Kalamamsi, Changu Narayan and Muhanpokhari, which will come into full operation within a month. The Municipality will be responsible for its operation and management while the operation cost will be covered by monthly rental from shops.

Earlier, there were only two public toilets while one is at the designing phase. The Municipality is planning to construct five more public toilets in a public-private partnership at the community level by July 2020.

"Sustenance of public toilet without tying up with business purposes is difficult so we have used this model," said Chiranjibi Timalisina, Chief Administrative Officer at Changu Narayan Municipality. "However, we are planning to use public-private partnership model to sustain public toilets at community level."

The report on 'Sustainability of open defecation free campaign in Global Sanitation Fund (GSF) supported programme districts in Nepal 2016', jointly published by Ministry of Water Supply and Sewerage, UN Habitat, GSF and Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, strongly recommended the need for public toilets in all GSF program districts in order to sustain the ODF declaration. The report highlighted the need of WASH-Coordination Committees (CCs) clear perspectives, plans, or financing models regarding public toilets in the needy areas for its sustainability.

The Government of Nepal declared Nepal as Open Defecation Free in September 2019. According to Department of Water Supply and Sewerage, improved sanitation coverage has reached to 99.2% in 2018 while it was 6% in 1990. With an aim to sustain the ODF status in the country, UN-Habitat started the Post ODF program in the four districts; Bajura, Bardiya, Arghakhachi, and Bhaktapur in the first phase. Bhaktapur was one of the districts where the programme started as a year-long total sanitation (Post ODF) project from August 2017. UN-Habitat Nepal had executed GSF programmes in 19 districts covering 696 erstwhile Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Municipalities from 2010-2018.

“Realising the need for a proper operation mechanism in place, GSF/ UN Habitat is planning to provide support to form a public toilet management committee and enhance the capacity of the committee through a Memorandum of Understanding,” said Parwati Dangal, district coordinator of GSF, UN-Habitat. “We are providing support to incorporate these issues into the system.”

Leave no one behind

Changunayaran Municipality, the first Municipality in Bagmati Province, province 3 in endorsing Total Sanitation Strategic Plan 2018 at government level, has made all effort to ensure that no one is left behind while exercising their right to sanitation including the use of toilets. GSF, UN-Habitat had provided technical support in preparing the plan.

“The recently built toilets will also be disabled-friendly with ramps as these toilets are in the same floor of building unlike Tathali one where the toilet is downstairs,” said Som Prasad Mishra, Mayor of Changu Narayan Municipality. “We are also procuring and installing sanitary napkin vending machine in each commu-

nity secondary level schools with GSF, UN-Habitat providing us some financial support from the remaining amount of last year’s GSF matching fund.”

In addition to this, the Municipality is also planning to implement public-private partnership for public toilets with significant improvements such as provision for ramps, menstrual hygiene sanitation etc. “The MoU with local community would provide a sense of ownership and even the users will feel accountable,” said Mishra. The Municipality has funds if needed for more public toilets but the demand for it has to come from the community. According to ‘Study on sustainability of ODF Campaign in GSF Supported Programme Districts, Nepal 2016’, 74 % of the respondents mentioned financial constraint as the main reason behind households lacking toilets, 55% mentioned of not having any land or space while 19 % mentioned of having no need because the bushes, river, or fields were nearby. These issues might be addressed with the construction of public toilets at the community level.

Tathali Public Toilet is operated by Taththali Ekata Samaj (TES) (Thaththali United Society)- a local social organization, which has played a crucial role in sustaining public toilets leading to ODF sustainability. The venue for public toilet was chosen based on densely populated market area and it has access to road to two places – Suryabinayak 10- and Changu-8. The venue has become even appropriate after the earthquake disaster in 2015 when the people from rural areas migrated and took shelter in rented rooms without any provisions of toilets. The toilet has indeed played an important role in keeping the environment clean because recently built two mourning homes on both the side of the river do not have toilets for the visitors and the visitors use the public toilets.

Gyanendra Thapa, president of TES claimed that everyday around 100 people use the toilet facility. Thapa said, the public toilet is self-sustained from the income of monthly Rs 10,000 (approx. US \$ 100) it generates from the rented two room upstairs and that TES has savings of Rs 100,000 (approx. US \$ 1000) in Thaththali Saving and Debt Cooperatives. “Earlier we wanted to charge minimum fee for the toilet use but we realised that people would rather go to the river and bushes to relieve themselves then pay the fee so we made it free of cost,” said Thapa.

GSF, UN-Habitat support to tackle challenges

The total Sanitation Strategic Plan 2018 prepared by Municipality Water Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination Committee reported that 86.6 % households have septic tanks. Similarly, the study of sustainability of ODF campaign in GSF supported districts report mentioned that 8 % of the respondents did not know how to manage feces after toilets were filled up with it as the main reason behind households without toilets.



Parwati Nepal washes her hands with soap and water after using public toilet in Tathali Bhaktapur. **PC:** Renu Kshetry



Girls are using recently constructed public toilet at MuhanPokhari in Changu Narayan Municipality of Bhaktapur district. Such public toilets ensure better WASH facilities and menstruation hygiene among girls and women. **PC:** Renu Kshetry

“In order to address the problem, Kathmandu Valley Board and TA Hub is supporting the Municipality in preparation of Faecal Sludge Management Plan (FSM) and formulation of FSM work procedure of Municipality,” informed Mishra. GSF, UN-Habitat helped in the coordination and networking.

GSF, UN-Habitat has focused on institutionalization of total sanitation programme by enhancing the capacity of D-WASH-CC, Rural Municipality WASH-CC, and stakeholders on post ODF strategies, plans and concepts etc. It also provides support in formulation of district and rural Municipality level strategic Post ODF and WASH plans at municipal level which includes budget allocations and priorities, monitoring mechanisms, coordination, collaboration and networking with other stakeholders and information management and reporting system etc.

According to a Municipality Survey 2017, 94.43 % household has proper use of the toilet and around 5 % do not have proper use of toilet. In order to address the remaining households, the Municipality and GSF, UN-Habitat have conducted around 100 awareness trainings on sanitation and hygiene in a year.

A call for action

“ We have a very ambitious task at hand and we should not forget that if we slag down after achieving a first mile then there is a danger of all our achievements going down the drain,” said Timalsina. “Total sanitation is only possible with public’s habit and behavioral change, so the more technical and financial support we receive at this crucial period would be the best. ”

The Municipality is making everything possible to achieve total sanitation by 2021 but the support, coordination and expertise from donor partners, NGOs and civil society has been shrinking post ODF declaration.

