

## **Hamirpur district: A journey from ‘exploring to ‘explaining’**

Hamirpur is the smallest district of Himachal Pradesh. With an area of 1,118 sq km, it is located on the western side of the district, close to the Punjab border. There are four administrative sub-divisions, six development blocks, 229 Gram Panchayats, and 1,694 revenue villages in the district. Hamirpur’s total population was 454,000 as of the 2011 Census. The population is predominantly rural, at 93 percent.

The project proposal for the Total Sanitation Campaign was approved in 2002, at which point close to 44 percent of the households had toilets. There was practically no progress in this area until the beginning of 2006-07; less than 1 percent of the target of 57,000 home toilets had been installed over the five years. Hamirpur was among the low-performing districts in the state in terms of TSC progress.

The district-level nodal agency (DRDA) used to wonder what could be done to motivate communities to make progress in the Total Sanitation Campaign; they had explored many conventional approaches but none was particularly successful. It was at this time that the state government introduced training programs on Community-led Total Sanitation (CLTS ), with the support of the World Bank’s Water and Sanitation Program (WSP). Hamirpur volunteered to become one of the first districts to organize the training program.

The CLTS training put an end to quandaries over ‘what to do,’ as it provided an effective strategy and tools through which to motivate communities to change deep-rooted behavior and to achieve Open-Defecation Free (ODF) communities. Since then, there has been no looking back. The nodal agency (DRDA) devised and institutionalized a community-owned campaign that produced incredible results. The district once considered as a ‘low performer’ could claim almost half of the Nirmal Gram Puraskars (NGPs) that were awarded to HP in 2010. In 2012, Hamirpur was one of the top 10 districts in India in terms of the number of NGPs it received. Already 157 Gram Panchayats in the district (close to 70 percent) were awarded NGPs.

Two institutional aspects appear to have made the critical difference: a good program manager in the nodal agency (DRDA) and a good support agency, which has provided resource support in the six blocks and at the district level. However, these were not all; a number of factors contributed to the success story of rural sanitation in Hamirpur.

## **Institutions**

The district established a district-level sanitation committee with a Deputy Commissioner as Chairperson and a Project Officer DRDA as Member Secretary, who was also the district nodal officer of TSC. Sub-divisional Officers were designated as TSC nodal officers for concerned blocks; they took a lead role in universalizing the sanitation campaign by ensuring the active participation of various departments. The district also institutionalized block-level sanitation committees under the leadership of chairman of Panchayat Samiti and BDO as Member Secretary. The committee gave high priority to reviewing and monitoring the campaign's progress every month.

At the Gram Panchayat level, the entire collective Panchayat, led by the Pradhan, facilitated the campaign. The school teachers and members of Mahila Mandals (women's groups) have played particularly important roles in motivating communities to adopt best sanitation practices.

The Himachal Pradesh Voluntary Health Association was engaged as a support organization, lending dedicated staff at the district and block levels, in addition to facilitating IEC activities. The staff engaged by the support organization reported directly to the Project Officer. Ownership of the campaign remained with the community and government, however, as the role of the NGO was merely to facilitate communication and mobilize communities around the issue of sanitation.

## **Community Mobilization**

The district has adopted an intensive campaign approach to create a demand for sanitation at all levels, with a focus on the social and health benefits of achieving ODF. The following IEC activities were facilitated in the district:

- The TSC cell arranged to perform a *Kala Jatha* (street play and cultural programs) in all the blocks and GPs, and disseminated messages derived from the CLTS training.
- Sanitation-related messages and slogans were painted along the highways, in public spaces, on government buildings, etc. throughout the district.
- Door-to-door campaigns and interpersonal communication were carried out in all six blocks.

- Swachhta Week and ‘Swachata Utsav’ are being celebrated throughout the state on a yearly basis. These high-visibility programs have created a surge in the level of awareness regarding the state’s commitment to achieving *nirmal* status.
- Communication materials in the form of leaflets, posters, etc. are also distributed, particularly during Swachhta Week.

This multipronged strategy for community mobilization helped to create a sense of urgency among the elected leaders in the community, who, in turn, have campaigned intensely in their respective constituencies to create a shift in behavior. Thanks to the CLTS training of key stakeholders, the themes of ‘shame’ and ‘disgust’ that dominated campaign discourse have become drivers of change.

Many Gram Panchayats adopted a negative reinforcement strategy by instituting a penalty for open-defecation that was announced in village meetings and backed up by display boards. This was a bold step, made possible by political endorsement at the highest level. Irrespective of whether or not a fine was actually levied in cases of infringement, the new regulation had symbolic power and stood as evidence of social pressure to stop the practice of open-defecation. Discussions with those having built toilets as a result of the campaign reveal that social pressure was a key motivating factor.

### **Technology and Supply Chain**

The district did not promote any particular technology over another; households were encouraged to select the toilet model that best suited their needs and budget. People have generally managed to procure the materials necessary for building their own toilets in the market. As demand began to increase, sanitary shops at the block level started stocking more materials. Neighbors and community members collaborated to engage local masons, though they generally provided a single technical option: single pit offset from the pan with an RCC slab.

These toilets can cost between `10,000 and `30,000, depending on the site. They generally have a permanent superstructure and the pit cover is an RCC slab at least three inches thick. For solid and liquid waste management, plans are made at the Gram Panchayat level, and decentralized waste management systems such as compost pits and soak pits are promoted. For non-degradable waste, efforts are made to encourage recycling through the *kabadiwala*.

## **Financing**

Consistent with the state's policy, Hamirpur district has not used the incentives available for the BPL as the primary motivation for people to adopt toilets. It **was** also made clear that the incentive would be released only after all households were using toilets and the entire Panchayat had been confirmed as *nirmal* (ODF). Once a Panchayat informs the block office it has achieved ODF status, the claim is verified through peer review, in which the members of one GP verify the status of another, avoiding reciprocal verification.

The amount of the incentive is not linked to the value of any particular toilet design, although the twin leach pit model was demonstrated for the benefit of households and masons, who were trained in constructing toilets in this fashion. No intermediaries are involved in the release of subsidies. For solid and liquid waste management, funds from various programs such as NBA (TSC) and MNREGA are leveraged to support plans made at the Gram Panchayat level. To offset costs, many panchayats have also used prize money from various reward schemes sponsored by state and national governments to improve systems of solid and liquid waste management.

## **Capacity Building**

The district's sanitation campaign drew its initial momentum from the five-day CLTS workshop, organized for senior DRDA staff members, including all BDOs. A series of training programs was arranged at the district and block levels in collaboration with the support organization. In particular, school teachers and office bearers of Mahila Mandals were trained in methods for motivating communities and children to adopt changes in sanitation-related behavior. Technical training sessions were also facilitated at the block level to ensure the adoption of environmentally safe technologies. After achieving complete ODF status throughout the district, the focus shifted to solid and liquid waste management. To this end, the DRDA facilitated an exposure visit to Kurukshetra in Haryana in May 2012 for the benefit of a group of PRI members and officers, which resulted in the acceleration of the district's progress in solid and liquid waste management.

## **Monitoring**

The program has been closely monitored at the district level in monthly sanitation committee meetings, in which BDOs report on progress. At the block level, BDOs similarly review progress in monthly meetings with the Panchayat Secretaries. Furthermore, a meeting of the Block Development Committee (BDC) is held regularly, attended by the elected Panchayat Samiti members and the line

functionaries. Monitoring the TSC is another priority item on the agenda of these meetings. It is important to note that this monitoring was focused more on community-level outcomes, such as ODF status achievement. Cross-verification processes were also established in the district to verify the claims of ODF Gram Panchayats.

### **Rewards and Recognition**

Along with the NGP, the Government of Himachal Pradesh has instituted three additional reward schemes:

- The *Maharishi Valmiki Sampurna Swachata Puraskar* (MVSSP) was created in 2007. This State Sanitation Reward Scheme is implemented through a competitive process and recognizes and rewards the efforts of village communities (winners at the block, district, divisional, and state levels) in achieving Total Sanitation status.
- In 2009-10, Himachal rolled out a competition based reward scheme for the cleanest schools at the block and district levels. This reward recognizes those schools whose efforts and outcomes have helped achieve *Nirmal Himachal*.
- *Mahila Mandal Protsahan Yojna*, in which there is a provision for rewarding five Mahila Mandals (women's groups) having contributed to the promotion of TSC and especially having helped a GP to achieve ODF status.

Hamirpur district has implemented all the reward schemes noted above and has documented the process meticulously. These programs have been very effective in creating healthy competition among rural communities determined to achieve nirmal status. They also turned out to be effective IEC tools, thanks to media coverage of the awards.

### **Scaling-up and Sustainability**

Hamirpur adopted a demand-driven approach for scaling-up rural sanitation. Community mobilization initiatives such as Kala Jatha and Swachata Week were undertaken in all the GPs, then subsequently focused more on those GPs having shown interest in scaling-up rural sanitation. In such a manner, within a few years, all the GPs were covered and Hamirpur became the state's first ODF district by 2009-10. Once the ODF status was achieved, the DRDA shifted the campaign's focus to solid and liquid waste management and hygiene practices. A third-party

rapid assessment of the district claims that the ODF status has held in close to 100 percent of households, with the exception of the floating population.

Hamirpur's success story would not be complete without mentioning the Project Officer of DRDA, Shri Ajit Bhardwaj. The TSC benefitted enormously from the fact that the Project Officer was able to remain in that position continuously for almost six years, beginning in 2006, which is very uncommon in the state. This stable leadership helped the campaign to consolidate strategies and achieve sustainable results. In a recent interview, Shri Ajit Bhardwaj described his tenure as a journey from considering 'what to do' to explaining 'what we have done.' The media and the larger population have expressed increasing interest in Hamirpur's success story, but the Project Officer is careful to remind us that 'Hamirpur would not have been a success story if it was not for the hard work of the staff of government and support organizations, as well as for the proactive facilitation of PRI members and Mahila Mandals.'

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