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Small Steps, Big Leaps: Community Led Approach to Water and Sanitation

Country: India

Organization: Swayam Shikshan Prayog

Field of Work: Sanitation

Year the initiative began: 2000

- **Main barrier addressed:** Public information alone doesn't change behaviors
- **Main insight addressed:** Move people up the sanitation ladder

What is your signature innovation, your new idea, in one sentence? Sustainable & Demand-driven: mobilize & build capacity of women and rural communities to create demand and take water & sanitation issues into their own hands.

Describe your innovation. What makes your idea unique and different than others doing work in the field? SSP's work follows a grassroots participatory development model, whereby grassroots rural communities, especially women, are mobilized and given tools to develop their own as Total Sanitation Communities.

The innovation is in the approach which SSP takes to achieve the goal of ensuring safe and reliable access to water and safe sanitation standards for all. The approach is innovative because:

- 1) SSP mobilizes and builds the capacity of community members, especially women's collectives (or self help groups, SHGs), to engage key stakeholders to create demand for total sanitation in partnership with the village leadership
- 2) SSP works closely with the local levels of political leadership and government to make their programs more accountable and demand driven (bottom-up). SSP also works with women's groups to articulate and address women's gender issues in water & sanitation programming. These community and local government partnerships can be effectively replicated to address sanitation concerns and strengthen grassroots democracy.

Delivery Model: How do you implement your innovation and apply it to the challenge/problem you are addressing? The Total Sanitation strategy promotes the vision of safer and healthier communities starting with trigger exercises that create demand for change in entire communities. Village governments and women's self help groups partner to stop open defecation, prepare community plans for safe water and sanitation and find resources for households and communities to put into place sanitation infrastructure and services.

Public health impact: demonstrated by lower rates of water-borne illnesses in children and families.

Women's health: positively impacted due to improved access to sanitation.

How do you plan to expand your innovation? The Total Sanitation strategy sphere headed by women's groups in partnership with their local governments is the model directly operating in 200 villages in Maharashtra and 67 villages in Gujarat. SSP will first expand this model to all of the 1,064 villages of the three states (Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu) in which it currently operates its other programs. Impact studies are done through self assessment in successful clean villages year after year. Every year, new champions are added to the list of innovators. They are supported by SSP to lead the awareness campaign and transfer the lessons and strategies to

new communities who wish to transform themselves.

SSP advocates increased accountability of sanitation programs and resources to women and community groups and highlights successful practices at state, national and international levels.

Furthermore, as a member organization of GROOTS (Grassroots Organizations Operating in Sisterhood) International, SSP shares best practices and innovations with fellow members, which facilitates replication of its innovation to areas beyond its geographical reach.

Do you have any existing partnerships, and if so, how do you create them? SSP has partnered with women's savings and credit self help groups and local governments and leveraged these long standing partnerships to mobilize and sustain communities on total sanitation issues.

SSP acts as key resource agency to Government of Maharashtra on training officials and organizations to centre stage women's participation in the total sanitation approach. It has partnered with the World Bank Water and Sanitation Program to document case studies and institutionalize lessons in the mainstream Jalswarajya water and sanitation programs.

Provide one sentence describing your impact/intended impact. SSP mobilizes and empowers communities to demand for, implement and maintain water and sanitation related projects and utilize existing government resources to maximize their impact.

- **What are the main barriers to creating or achieving your impact?** While working in partnership with the government is a very important component of this innovation and allows for the efficient use of existing facilities, resources and infrastructure, several barriers are also brought upon by this partnership which can limit or adversely affect the achievement of positive impact. Some of these barriers are described as follows.

Time period to achieve targets: One barrier to achieving impact is that in working with the government, SSP is often faced with short deadlines within which targets need to be achieved. These deadlines are not always reasonable, especially because reaching these targets requires first that the community to be mobilized.

Information is lacking: Often, there isn't full penetration of appropriate information from the top-down. At the state level, some government resolutions are taken, however this information does not always reach the community.

Government organized program is target based and supply driven: SSP has faced difficulties in resisting the reversion of the government water and sanitation programs from demand-driven and community led programs to target-based and supply-driven programs. Jalaswarajya, the government's water supply program, began as a community demand-driven program, but is slowly reverting back to a supply-driven program. SSP continues to work with the government to ensure that the community has a strong voice in the development initiatives that are implemented.

How many people have you served or plan to serve? SSP in partnership with the government has reached a large number of villages and households via its community mobilization approach to water and sanitation. In the future, it plans to expand the reach of its water and sanitation work to all the 1,604 villages of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu in which it currently operates its other programs with 60,000 self help group members. Beyond this, SSP endeavours to reach many others through this work, as is discussed above.

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- **Directly:** Approximately 270 villages and over 40 000 households have been directly reached by SSP's water and sanitation work in Maharashtra and Gujarat. Additionally, it has directly trained and built the capacity of 11 200 community members and government officials.
- **Indirectly:** Indirectly, SSP has reached well over 200 000 households in 1000 villages in Maharashtra and Gujarat. SSP has also indirectly contributed to capacity building of 50 000 community members and government officials (through training of trainers). It is important to note, however, that the actual number of households and villages reached and individuals trained indirectly by SSP's work is likely

much greater than noted above because indirect impact has been very difficult to measure.

Please list any other measures of the impact of your innovation? Other measures of the impact of this innovation include the number of villages which are 100% open defecation free, the number of villages which have overcome the problem of water scarcity and the sustainability of the innovation (that the community continues to monitor and maintain its water and sanitation management systems autonomously).

- **Is there a policy intervention element to your innovation, if so please describe?** Yes, policy intervention is a very critical element of SSP's innovation. SSP uses its experience in grassroots mobilization to inform its policy recommendations to the government. It continues to advocate for a community led and gender sensitive approach in state and national policy and programming.

Exactly who are the beneficiaries of your innovation? The beneficiaries of SSP's innovation are the community members who are directly involved in the water and sanitation projects of their and nearby villages through advocacy, lobbying the government, mobilizing peers, implementing and operating water and sanitation infrastructure as well as those community members who are benefiting from the results of the water and sanitation work in their villages.

How is your initiative financed (or how do you expect your initiative will be financed)? The water and sanitation initiative funding comes from government partners as well as the UNDP, World Bank, Citi Foundation and Hivos.

Provide information on your finances and organization: Current Annual budget (2007 fiscal year): 30 000 000 Rs. or approx. 747 000 USD Annual budget for the past 1-2 years (2006 and 2005): 25 000 000 Rs. or approx 623 000

Annual revenue generated: 1 500 000 Rs. or approx. 37 000 USD

Current sources and/or streams of revenue? Government of Maharashtra, Government of Gujarat and donor agencies (Ford Foundation, Hivos, Miseroer, AJWS, Citi Foundation)

Sources of earned income: Sources are income from investments and fixed deposit with banks

What is the potential demand for your innovation? The potential demand for SSP's innovation is enormous because it is viable and applicable in any rural community context. Therefore, any rural community in need of an effective model for and community ownership of a water and sanitation program, would potentially demand this innovation.

Number of Staff: 50 full-time, 20 part-time, 5 volunteers

What are the main barriers to financial sustainability? Funding for SSP's water and sanitation initiative usually comes in the form of small grants. Therefore, there is a lack of long-term funding for this kind of work. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the government is often very focused on reaching targets as opposed to ensuring long term sustainable development. This is a barrier to financial sustainability of these initiatives because once a given target is reached, funding flows sometimes stop.

What is the origin of this innovation? Tell us your story. Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP, Registration No. Bom.452/1998) is a grassroots women's and community-focused rural development organization whose mission is to build and enhance core social, economic and political competencies of grassroots women's collectives and communities with the aim of bringing the rural poor, women and communities from the margins to the mainstream of development.

SSP began working with women's collectives or self help groups (SHGs) in 1989 mainly in the savings and credit sector. As its work progressed, it began to build their capacities in the development and maintenance of alternative livelihoods and began to mobilize them around community development issues. It saw the benefit of involving SHGs (who were already formed and had been working together in savings and credit operations) into village development opportunities. It also remarked that as awareness about certain issues (i.e. health) was raised amongst SHG members, they began to demand more services, information and training from the government and

SSP. This lead directly to the development of SSP's water and sanitation work in 2000, which takes an approach that is fully reliant on community mobilization and participation and follows a demand-driven approach.

Please provide a personal bio. Note this may be used in Changemakers marketing material: After completion of her M.Phil Sociology, Prema Gopalan was involved in a range of large scale research studies on housing and basic services for urban poor and access to health services by rural communities and women. Prema was among the founders of SPARC (Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centers) in 1984, a national organization working with urban poor on housing and basic services. She is also the founder and executive director of SSP (established as a self education network in 1989).

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