

Sanitary Latrines improving Hygiene Conditions

The beneficiaries of V2R project installed sanitary latrines in their houses with technical and financial support of the project. Starting from children learning about hygiene practices to the women having privacy while changing sanitary pads – a positive change that is steadily taking place in Teknaf.

Introduction

From its inception in 2019, the Vulnerability to Resilience (V2R) project in Teknaf, Cox's Bazar has provisioned 1,197 sanitary latrines (1,045 single offset pit and 152 twin-pit) in 10 communities. We have conducted five focus group discussions with the recipients of latrine support to understand the changes observed in the host communities after they received information and assistance for building, improving, and maintaining the latrine, and information about personal and environmental hygiene. They have reported changes in self-esteem and wellbeing (especially women and young girls who are menstruating) due to having access to a household latrine.



One of the beneficiaries voluntarily cleaning up their latrines. There is a growing sense of personal and surrounding hygiene. Source: BDRCS.

Content

Improved knowledge and practice in building, improving, and maintaining the latrine

The beneficiaries believe that if the latrine is broken, they can and should repair it. They are more aware of the importance of latrine and how it can improve for their health and wellbeing. The latrines are as easy to use and maintain. They were constructed using the local building techniques and materials which are easier to repair and available in the local market. As the masons are from the community, they can reach out to them for help if needed. They are confident about the quality of the latrines and believe that they can sustain for at least 10-15 years if maintained properly. They said if they struggle to manage the cost of repair, the work might be delayed but will certainly be done. As the latrine is seen as an important asset, they are more likely to protect and maintain it.

Improved behaviour changes in personal hygiene and reduced open defecation

One of the more noticeable changes after having improved latrines is that there is no faeces or foul smell in the community. There are also fewer flies around the areas. They find the improved latrines more comfortable in comparison to the ones they had before. Hygiene awareness is strengthened in the community. With the water pits having a cover, they are more confident that their water sources are clean and safe to use. There is a new practice to use separate sandals when using the latrines to prevent sand/soil from dirtying the latrines. They believe that the latrine structure is strong enough to withstand against cyclone and other natural calamities.



Cleaning is usually done once a week with detergent powder, bleaching powder or other cleaning agents. Some of them clean the latrine every day, especially those with small children. The parents generally clean up after each time their child has use it.

The hand washing station is often near to the latrine, some are inside the bathroom, and some are near the tube-well or dug-well. They wash their hands with detergent/soap after using the latrine every time.

They reported that the defecation situation is significantly better than before. Previously, there were some issues around maintenance and privacy. For instance, the pits in many of the latrines were broken, the latrines were not water-sealed, faeces and flies seen in the open latrines, and polythene fencing was used as wall structure which does not offer privacy and is not cyclone resistant. As a result, water-borne diseases like diarrhoea and cholera were common. It is common to see people disposing children's faeces everywhere. Faecal waste is not managed properly. Now, the situation has improved through continuous advocacy and awareness development activities such as courtyard sessions by the field staff and volunteers. However, a few of the houses in the community still have latrines with broken or open pits that need fixing.

Changes in self-esteem and wellbeing

Many of the young girls and women in the community have started using the sanitary pads (both single use and reusable ones). It is partly because many of the aid agencies distribute sanitary pads, hygiene kits or dignity kits to the households. Some are still using the traditional cotton clothes as they do not have the means to afford buying the sanitary pads. Some of them have sought help from family members to help them purchase.

They usually change their sanitary pad inside the house which is a common practice. After receiving the latrines, they now have an alternative option. They are able to change inside the latrine when there are guests in the house during different gatherings. The latrine being very near to their home and inside the yard makes it easier for them to access at all time of the day to use or change the pads.

Generally, the women who use sanitary pads rely on regular supplies given by the humanitarian organizations. The pads are available in the local dispensaries. They can buy if they want to. They either purchase on their own or ask other female members in their household (sister, mother, sister-in-law) to purchase. They never ask their male family members for that. They expressed that they feel hesitation while asking the male shopkeepers for the sanitary pads as they live in a conservative community.

For disposal of the sanitary pads, if the quantity is larger, they dig a hole somewhere beside the house and buried them. Otherwise, they leave the used pad in the latrine after they change it. Some of them, especially those who use the clothes, burn or bury them if they are not washed. Disposing the used pads is not a problem for them, but they sometimes feel shy if any of their male family members see them disposing it. Digging a hole to bury it or burning it can be difficult when it rains.



Lessons learned

We know that the community will struggle to protect and maintain the latrines if they are not provided with continuous awareness education before and after the provision of latrine support. This helps to ensure that knowledge and practice of hygiene are reinforced over time. Some areas in the community still require hardware support. Addressing this will prevent spread of diseases and ensure equitable access to latrine. Some women are still disposing the sanitary pad irresponsibly. This needs further awareness education. Aside from engaging with women on menstrual hygiene management, it is important to also engage with men to sensitize them as to promote a supportive environment when it comes to making sanitary pads easily accessible in the community and reduces the stigma of purchasing, using and disposing sanitary pads.

Next steps

We will continue to emphasize on menstrual hygiene in our awareness raising sessions in the community, and to involve men as individual or group in different type of sensitization activities. There is a plan to organise simulation exercise with the women and girls on proper disposal of menstrual materials. In collaboration with the relevant local government departments, we will increase the health and hygiene promotional activities in the communities. We are also planning to provide addition hardware support for selected households.

Contact information

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