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A PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY FOR SANITATION IN BANGLADESH

Cole P. Dodge

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There is one thing for certain that is common to each and everyone of us. Today is the first day of the rest of our lives. We cannot live in the past. Today is the first day of our entire future. But we enjoy the benefits of the past. We live in our own history.

One of Bangladesh's successes of the past, where no other country in South Asia has had similar success, is the provision of clean drinking water.

Due to the success of the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) and the Government of Bangladesh, 80 per cent of the population has access to handpumps and 80 per cent of the population drinks water from handpumps.

When I first came to Bangladesh in 1974 and visited Roumari in the far North of the country, I was served a glass of water from the reserve pond, as that water was considered to be the most tasty. When I went to Aricha or Bahadurabad ghats or when I traveled to Comilla or Chittagong I was repeatedly served water from the reserved ponds. Needless to say, I had serious bouts of stomach upset during those days.

Today, whenever we travel and ask at tea stalls about the quality of water, people say it is safe. If we ask why, they say it is from the nearby tubewell. In fact, when you cross the Aricha ferry you come across children selling water in aluminum jugs. They always reassure us that their water is clean because it comes from tubewells.

Clearly, there has been a big leap forward in people's understanding and perception of

the quality of water we drink and use. In the minds of people, the value of clean water is now well established. And yet, a tubewell is far more difficult to install, its far more expensive, and it is far more technical than a latrine. But the lack of sanitation is not for lack of trying by the Government. It was back in 1958 when DPHE first introduced the water-sealed latrine. It was improved in 1962, intensified in 1972 and expanded in 1978. And yet, today only one out of twenty people uses a proper latrine in Bangladesh. The program UNICEF has been supporting since 1966 has failed to reach its target.

So when we look into the future keeping the experiences of the past in mind and, remembering that to-day is the first day of the rest of our life, it is not surprising that we in UNICEF, we in DPHE and we in the Ministry of Health look to the involvement of Ansar-VDP and other partners to join in this, the biggest public health challenge, the challenge of a sanitation revolution in Bangladesh.

But are we up against the impossible? All of the planners in Dhaka, all of the engineers and the health officials have concluded that it is impossible for Bangladesh, in the course of the next five year plan, to increase sanitation coverage by more than about 10 per cent.

age points and yet, we are convinced that within one year the Ansar-VDP can increase the coverage to over 20 per cent. How? That requires that we do things differently than we did in the past. It also involves figuring out how to "do the impossible."

Bangladesh is a beautiful country, and the beautiful birds that come here from Russia every year, the Siberian ducks, will start coming soon. I am reminded of the story about the scientist who studies how the Siberian duck was able to fly from the Northern part of Russia to the "char" and "haor" areas of Bangladesh to escape the freezing arctic winter of northern Russia. The first of the scientist did was to examine one duck and the efficiency of that duck flying through the air. He calculated the number of kilometers which it had to and then calculated the number of kilometers which it had to fly and then calculated the amount of energy which the bird had stored up in its body fat for use on the long flight.

When he had done all his calculations he concluded that it was impossible for the duck of fly from Russia to Bangladesh — just as the planners and the engineers and the health officials have concluded that it was impossible to get sanitation coverage to a high level in a short period of

time. Let us return to the scientist and his problem of how these birds actually fly from Siberia to Bangladesh and go back.

One cool fall day the scientist was sitting on the banks of the Brahmaputra next to a poet friend. They looked overhead and they saw a "V" formation of ducks flying South. The scientist explained the matter to the poet and the issue that had been bothering him. And the poet thought: "Well, if the individual duck cannot go alone, then may be there is something to the ducks working together? The scientist scratched his head and went back to his laboratory. He re-constructed his wind-resistance models and began his second phase of experiment. He found that the movement of the wings of the lead duck creates a small pocket of low air pressure immediately behind the wings. The next bird just slips into that pocket and thus gets the benefit of the rushing air that flows from all directions to fill the pocket. The third bird gets the same energy-discount by taking advantage of the low-pressure pocket created by the second bird. By flying in formation, each duck benefits from the one ahead and the process continues to the last bird. The scientist came up with results that by flying in forma-

tion, all of the ducks gain 71 per cent more efficiency i.e., the ducks fly 171 miles by putting in the energy that they need to cover 100 miles when they fly individually, in working together they can fly from Siberia to the Chars and Haors of Bangladesh.

Sitting back on the banks of the Brahmaputra, the scientist was feeling very proud of himself for having solved this problem in a scientific way. He related his discovery to the poet, and the poet asked: "Ah! yes my learned friend, but what about the lead duck, the one at the tip of the 'V'? The lead duck does not get any such advantage. He has to lead the way. How does that duck have the energy to fly all the way?"

The scientist finally made two observations. One is that whenever ducks fly in a flock, they make a constant honking noise. They make a noise from behind, encouraging the lead duck to go on. The lead duck takes this encouragement and keeps going. The second observation was that it's not only one duck that leads. When the lead duck gets tired, it drops out and another duck comes to the front to take to the leadership role.

Bangladesh has experienced the success of working together constantly

bringing in new leadership and new allies in such activities like installing tubewells; popularizing "laban-gur" saline as the life saver of millions of diarrhoeal patients, especially children; a smooth transition to democracy through a peacefully held national election, and immunizing 65 per cent of all children under one year of age in a considerably short period of time through the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI).

Same has to be the case with sanitation. We need to draw as many allies and partners on board as possible to make the impossible possible. The Ansar-VDP has come forward with its huge number of enlisted men and women to work for sanitation in the rural areas of the country. The 45 lakh members of the organization are committed to building hygienic latrines for their own families. If done properly, that will dramatically improve the rural sanitation situation. District authorities, Upazila leadership, teachers and students of secondary schools and the local people have joined hands in Agailjhara and Banaripara Upazilas of Barisal to dismantle all hanging latrines and install hygienic home made covered-pit latrines in the area. The result has been a dramatic increase in sanitation coverage from almost nothing to over 70 per cent within only six months. Teachers of 11,000 primary schools of Rajshahi division have started a sanitation campaign in the northern districts. They are motivating their students, and through them their parents, to make their own



More tubewells mean access to more clean water.

hygienic latrines for their families. The process of social mobilization has started. We must all make turn leading and following, giving encouragement from behind.

It is clear that we can do much more working together than working independently.

Bangladesh has achieved the water decade goals, now we need a sanitation revolution — nothing less is required. And

we can do it by uniting our ideas, efforts and resources together in mobilizing the whole society to go for it. Every family to install its own sanitary latrine.

No matter it is a 'pukka' one or not, the latrine must contain the excreta in a pit and the pit must not overflow.

Cole P. Dodge is the UNICEF representative in Bangladesh.

An Electrifying Performance Sans Script

by Fayza Haq

THE actors on stage were not sophisticated performers. They had no training, experience or even the time for adequate rehearsals. They were uneducated and would not know how to handle a script. Yet these actors on the Mahila Samity stage electrified the audience with their performance and produced three plays last Friday. The Mokto Natok that the people from areas like Gaibandha 'anchal' and Modhupur 'anchal' produced hardly used any costumes and no props at all and yet they had the effect that professional actors find difficult to achieve.

Most of these labourers are agricultural wage earners. They do not possess any land of their own. Eighty per cent of them are illiterate. "Nijera Kori," a local NGO, has stirred itself to create a lot of awareness about their economic and social situation. They are being taught to fight against economic and social oppression and to be conscious of the evil aspects of dowry, wife-beating, desertion and rape. In order to improve their existence they have collective saving and regular meetings. As this is not enough, and they have the cultural media. Through songs and dances they try to remedy the evils around them.

The ones who are more interested and are able to form a cultural unit are guided by a group of advisors from "Nijera Kori." They provide drama training in the form of popular theatre of "Patha Natak". The plays they produce do not need a written script. The actors take the decision themselves about the theme and contents of the play they want to present. The play is something that affects their lives and about which they have enough knowledge. Once they have decided what they want to do the four advisors go into the background. Before that, of course, the experts help them decide what to delete and what to include. They add them in focusing on the main theme instead of digressing.

Having chosen the subject the actors themselves decide on the characters. They work out who is taking part in which role. The discussion period stretches out to only five days. The play is constructed by the actors themselves. The experts from Nijera Kori simply put the finishing touch.

Initially, after sitting and discussing for five days, they

practice for six months to a year. The experts, meanwhile, study their seriousness or whether they do not have enough initiative.

The enthusiasts are then brought to a central place for training for seven to ten days during which time they learn about body gestures, choreography, how to compose a drama, and the theory of drama. All this is verbal. They learn how to perform without props, and how to create sound effects through the mouth.

Initially the experts Masud Bibagi, Abdul Mannan, Abdus Samad and Walid Islam learnt from two advisors from two National School of Drama in India. The scripts, acting and direction belong to the actors themselves. The four experts simply suggest and advise.

They do not censor or change. All they do is tighten the script and delete anything that might weigh down the play.

Out of the seven women and eleven men taking part in "Horin Kholer Daak", one of the plays presented on the occasion, Rupban, 28, is divorced, and without any children. She sings "kirtans" and "bhajons" from place to place. She earns her living by singing. Added to this, she catches and sells fish during the season. She is also greatly involved in the saving project of the group.

Another interesting personality performing in the play is Shaymoli, 25, who has studied up to class X. She is unmarried. Due to her economic circumstances she has not progressed much more in her studies. She lives with her parents, and as a daughter of a fisherman, she

too catches fish, and looks after chicken and ducks. She is an active worker of Nijera Kori and travels from village to village suggesting how to improve their acting and general existence.

Bithi is a 32 year-old married participant of the play. She has a child, and she and her husband are active and conscious workers of the group.

"Horin Kholer Daak" was based on an incident which actually took place last year on November 7th. All the people acting were themselves involved in the incident. An individual wanted to do shrimp culture in an illegal way. The people protested but the entrepreneur planned to cut the salt water routes into the river. As a reaction 5000 people

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protested. These people were coming out in a procession on the road when the "gher malik" attacked them with guns. Two women fell on the spot. One's brain was spilled while many were injured. The miscreants made one of the bodies disappear. Another woman, Rupa, was taken to the emergency. The "gher malik" made an accusation through the police and made a case. He stated that the people had attacked the workers of the "gher malik".

Even though the injured were seriously wounded in the hospital they were handcuffed. Meanwhile the people from the village also made an official case. The newspapers flashed the truth to the world outside, however the "gher malik" had bribed his way to a release.

The government then accepted that there would be no shrimp culture. Yet false cases

ONE of the most effective tools of projecting political ideas is through drama because of its ability to reach people at a direct and personal level. The two plays performed on September 28th at the end of the two day drama festival arranged by 'Nijera Kori' are both political dramas touching upon social and environmental issues. The most important feature, however, of both plays is that they are performed by non-professional, untrained, unexposed people, ordinary people who do not stand out in a crowd but are rather a part of it, people whose lives are often disconcertingly close to the parts they play. This gives these plays the realism that is sometimes missed in professional dramas. But perhaps the most important function that these kind of plays or 'Patha Natak' perform is that they reach beyond the usual audience of the privileged and the intellectual; they reach out to the farmer, the fisherman,

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the rickshaw puller and the village housewife. Both plays are performed with superb acting and provoke a social and political awareness at all levels.

The first play performed by Comilla Anchal depicts the plight of the village people after the cyclone. It starts off with a song with the actors walking in a circle making movements as if they are floundering in the flood. The lines of pain and suffering are cruelly etched on their faces and it is with shock that one realizes that this pain is not an act but a reality for the souls trapped in these emaciated bodies. A classroom is simulated and the students share their common sorrows of homes, livestock and loved ones lost in the floods. The need to learn things that are related to their lives instead of irrelevant, abstract topics is projected when Sufia, the only female in the group says to the teacher "we do not want to study geography, we want to

A Thin Line Between Life and Drama

by Aasha Mehreen Amin

know why there are floods." The teacher then in very simple words explains the causes of floods such as unplanned roads and deforestation in the Himalayas which lead to inundation and pollution. All this is made clearer with the help of the students who act out the various events such as the cutting of trees, sedimentation of river beds etc in a very humorous way.

In another scene corruption of greedy political leaders and their favourites is portrayed. The flood victims question the government's relief efforts. "I hear the government is giving relief but where is it? So many people are getting relief but I didn't get anything, the chairman is giving food and medicine to his own relatives while we starve and die of diarrhoea" are the accusations that reverberate while unscrupulous hoarders gloat over their stocks of relief goods. Fights soon break out amongst the hypocritical champions of various political parties over their claims of whose party gave the most relief when the bewildered victims rise together and command them to stop. The play ends with a hopeful note: "why are we fighting, we should have equal rights why should we die?"

The second play performed by artists from Tangail Anchal

is probably more powerful and provocative of the two because of the sensitive issues it deals with. A historical narrative in the tune of a folk song is given recounting events from the movement against the oppressive British rule to the Independence movement of '71.

The entire play is a series of symbolism. The Hindu Muslim struggle is shown with the Hindus in dhottis and Muslims in their pajama kurtas chanting their differences in two separate processions. Then the 1952 Language Movement is depicted with a stern-looking Khaja Nazimuddin announcing that Bangla is non-Islamic so Urdu will be the national language. Processions of students follow halted by loud gunshots and they fall, blood staining their white clothes. This is then followed by the most dramatic scene of the play when three of the dead rise and form a Shaheed Minar while the song "amar bhatyer rokte rangano ekushe February" echoes in the background. The white clothes stained with red blood is very effective in creating the image of valour stained with mindless cruelty.

The next phase is the depiction of both the glory of the Independence movement and the disillusionment of its aftermath. The Muktiyoddhas

are shown as men with intense expressions holding rifles made of green bamboo to symbolize freedom while the Pakistani army and razakar's (collaborators) are caricatures holding real looking guns showing their intention to kill and torture. The unforgivable collaborator is shown as a pious-looking man who is the father of a freedom fighter but does not think twice about conspiring with the enemy and during the Muktiyoddhas into a death trap.

Towards the end of the play we are again haunted by the Shaheed Minar made of the three dead students and the play takes on a philosophical dimension. It is after liberation; the war of bullets has ended but the struggle against poverty and famine has just begun. A beggar walks by the Minar babbling about a dead son who used to be a freedom fighter. This we see is the same collaborator who had helped in killing the Muktiyoddhas. He sits on the steps of the monument not realizing its significance and fate takes its sweet revenge when a wealthy looking gentleman who has come to place flowers at the Minar brushes the beggar aside saying, "you are dirtying my clothes." This is also an attack against the hypocrisy of people who religiously visit the Shaheed Minar every year but are blind towards the original values of the men and women it eulogizes.

The disillusionment of the people is reflected in the chants "we want food, we want clothing, we want to live." As more people come to pay their

See Page 10



Players from Modhupur anchal: Real-life characters.



From Tangail anchal: Powerful and provocative.

See Page 10