

Engaging men and boys: Case Study of Male Forum, Jaipur

Rationale

This case study must be viewed in the context of informal settlements or slums in the city of Jaipur. These habitats are densely populated and have areas often at the rear end or in designated blocks where marginal communities such as transgender, persons with disabilities, SC, ST, OBCs, minorities and tribal reside.

In these settlements, the Slum Development Committee (SDC), which comprises men and local leaders who act as gatekeepers often in active collaboration with political leaders cater largely to the needs and priorities of the more influential section. They pay no attention to the needs of women, girls and other vulnerable groups. But soon the situation changed

What is the sanitation and/or hygiene initiative?

In Jaipur, the impetus for change came with the onset of COVID-19 when many in the ranks of men and boys realized especially during the lockdown that they and their families were not ready to deal with the virus. The women leaders and members of Single Window Forum (SWF) and Community Management Committee (CMC) with the support of CFAR team sensitized men and boys on the need to be aware of and to address the unsafe practices at the household and community level.

This resulted in 107 men forming Male Forums. They entered into a robust partnership with SWF and CMC members of 17 wards and reached out to 796 boys and men to strengthen handwash and safe hygiene practices including MHH at the household and community level. Together they set up nine low cost foot operated handwash stations, ramped up the pad bank to ensure timely and on-demand distribution of sanitary napkins and most importantly began to support SWF and CMC members in addressing long standing WASH issues, the brunt of which women had to face as primary carers of the family

How were men and boys involved in the initiative? Why were they involved?

Speaking about this, Subhash, Male forum member, Jaipur said that prior to COVID, men in their settlement were not ready to partner with SWF and CMC members. It was during the pandemic they realized the difficulties the women were facing in fetching water and often traversing long distances to get the water. Many of the men and in fact one by one reacted strongly and started supporting their wives to fetch water.

But soon the SWF and CMC members petitioned and brought the PHED officials to their settlement to lay water pipelines. Then the men realized the importance of strengthening the work women were doing and expanded the male forum across three settlements and together began to address the issue of safe water.

This is best illustrated in the manner in which the Male Forum in Kishanbagh basti, which is a 20-year old slum with 275 households comprising of highly marginal groups such as Bairwa, belonging to Scheduled Caste and Saansi a nomadic tribe and working as domestic workers, daily wage labourers, and auto drivers, made access to safe water a priority concern for the community. The last straw on the camel's back was when the one borewell installed by PHED was declared as unsafe due to the high presence of nitrate and fluoride.

In August 2020, the issue was raised at micro planning meeting in the ward and Male Forum led by Khemraj and Pooranmal, supported SWF members in their demand to the government to extend the Bisalpur pipeline to their area as part of the government's Water for Life or Jal Jeewan Mission. However as laying of pipeline is a long drawn process and can take up to two years, on September 27, 2020 a 2000 litre water tank was installed in the settlement with PHED taking responsibility for filling the tank daily. The tank is placed in the centre of the settlement and is easily accessible to all the houses in the settlement. The SWF and CMC and Male Forum members are making sure that water is only used for drinking purposes and is not getting wasted. "It has been a twenty year long struggle for safe water. We worked with SWF and CMC members and ensured that the households gets safe water to drink," stated Pooranmal, 60 years, Kishanbagh

Affirming this Phool, a CMC member said that she used to get water from the nearby ward which is two kilometres away and given the distance she was able to fetch only five buckets of water every day and manage with that for a family of five members. The situation became unbearable during pandemic, when movement got restricted and she went on to state that: "My husband became a member of the Male Forum and he not only helped me in fetching water but has joined hands with us to get PHED to lay the Bisalpur pipeline in our area."

What was the outcome of their involvement?

For themselves?

The involvement of men in a struggle being led by women to access safe water was in many ways a strong recognition of the fact that these issues were as important to them as the women. They not only played a supportive role and respected the leadership of women but also in the process got involved in the care and support of the family and doing chores which they used to treat as "women's only job." The fact that they could step out of their homes and very often one by one to support their wives in getting water showed they were also getting over their misplaced sense of male privilege and ego and realizing that partnership at every level from home to community was necessary

For WASH?

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Together, SWF, CMC and Male Forum members addressed and improved access to safe water. They achieved this in a settlement which was predominantly inhabited by highly marginal groups and was long neglected by the authorities. However the new-found unity both at the household and community level impacted the WASH system and made them more responsive. These over-200 households belonging to Scheduled Caste and nomadic tribe got safe water after a protracted struggle of 20 years and are in the process of moving towards access to more guaranteed supply of safely managed water

For gender and social equality?

The change in the perception about women's leadership is a significant breakthrough that got achieved in this period. Not only did they work with SWF and CMC members but also credited them for whatever success they got from their negotiations with PHED

This has encouraged them to mobilize more men, expand the Male Forums and strengthen their engagement both at the household and community level. The rise in the male participation and engagement has not only created an enabling environment for gender responsive WASH but is also helping in speeding up access to and improvement of WASH services, greater involvement in the care and support of women and other vulnerable groups and has the potential to shape processes that are transformative and in many ways can change gender norms that perpetuate inequality and discrimination