Integrated WASH Response for Building Resilience in Drought-Affected Desert Areas of District Umerkot, Sindh

CASE STUDY

“When there is a will, there is a Way”

Introduction:

Hygiene practice, knowledge and behavior are the driving force of health. Health is considered as the physical mental economic and social condition and satisfaction of a man and hygiene is the constitution to attain it. There are various types of diseases which directly or indirectly depend on hygiene practice. The people of the rural areas suffer from health and hygiene related diseases. Umerkot is a city that lies at the edge of famous Thar Desert. The great desert spreads over parts of Pakistan and India. The town
and the district is known (or spelled) as Umerkot by the Muslims and Amerkot by the Hindus. Umerkot is one of the oldest cities of Sindh and has much to offer in terms of history, culture and glory. It was once the capital of Greater Sindh Province that included some parts of present day Indian state of Rajasthan. Umerkot district has two distinct geographical portions: i.e. the irrigated area in the north and west and the desert in the south and east. One can see the sand dunes spreading towards east with thorny bushes. Towards west are the alluvial planes with vast stretches of vegetation. There is no river or natural stream in the district. Umerkot district consists of four Tehsils/Talukas namely Umerkot, Pithoro, Samaro and Kunri.

**Background:**

The Village namely Ramsar Sathi Menghwar is situated in desert area of union council Kaplore, District Umerkot, it is 54 kilometer away from district headquarter, there are 03 compounds/hamlets and 270 households are in this village. Miss Bemla is a change agent and determined lady of the village, she is married (have 3 children, 02 daughters and one son) her husband namely Mr. Gemro is a tailor and stitches clothes at village level, their source of income mostly depends upon it while they cultivate land on seasonal rain and their monthly income is 08 thousands/month.

**Before Intervention:**

Miss Bemla shares that before the WASH intervention we had not any practice of hygiene (Personal, Domestic and Environmental), because due to lack of education, knowledge and basic awareness, people often have a poor understanding regarding the health and hygiene. Personal hygiene is very important for protecting and maintaining health and addressing health problems and is also fundamental to the prevention of many diseases, particularly contagious diseases. Majority of the affected population has no appropriate attitudes towards health and hygiene and it made people unable to practice basic hygiene. Maximum number of people has unhygienic habits and practice. However maintaining good or acceptable personal hygiene is seldom perceived and acknowledged as protection against diseases. Poor health and hygiene practice became the root cause of infectious diseases in our village. Our source of income is lesser than our expenditure even we are unable to meet to buy food ration in appropriate quantity because we will have to save money for other expenditures like the education of children and health. Due to unhygienic condition and practices there are so many infectious diseases like severe diarrhea and water born diseases so for treatment we will have to travel to urban areas it costs a lot. I had/have wish to orient, educate the community as being human being our practices should be superior as we are created crown and superior creature, tried to work individually and had not space and proper guidance to work on this main issue of hygiene but could not be succeeded.
**After Intervention:**

SAFWCO launched a project on WASH, and started to orient the community for that. They conducted hygiene sessions in the community and I actively participated in those sessions. The PHP team distributed brochures and leaflets regarding the messages of hygiene, steps to wash hands with soap and critical timings. Then they started a session with personal hygiene. The exercise of proper personal hygiene is one of the essential parts of our daily life. Many people in rural areas may not understand what good or bad personal hygiene is. The prevention of communicable diseases, like diarrhea, trachoma, and many others is highly possible through the application of proper personal hygiene. You need to learn the proper practice of personal hygiene and use this for the prevention and control of important public health diseases that are prevalent in your locality.

Personal hygiene is a concept that is commonly used in medical and public health practices. It is also widely practiced at the individual level and at home. It involves maintaining the cleanliness of our body and clothes. Personal hygiene is personal, as its name implies. In this regard, personal hygiene is defined as a condition promoting sanitary practices to the self. Everybody has their own habits and standards that they have been taught or that they have learned from others. Generally, the practice of personal hygiene is employed to prevent or minimize the incidence and spread of communicable diseases. And then PHP team elaborated separately the methods of personal hygiene, the first task in body hygiene is to find water, soap and other cleansing materials. Taking a bath or a shower using body soap at least weekly is very important to ensuring our body stays clean. Bathing can be every day or after periods of sweating or getting dirty. The genitals and the anal region need to be cleaned well because of the natural secretions of these areas. Dry the body with a clean towel after thorough rinsing. Change into clean underwear after a bath. Changing sweat-soaked clothes after each bath is advised. Cleaning the ears after every bath is also necessary. Avoid sharing soaps and towels because of the danger of cross-infection. The mouth are the area of the body most prone to collecting harmful bacteria and generating infections. Our mouth mechanically breaks food into pieces. This process leaves food particles (food debris) that stick to the surface of our gums and teeth. Our mouth cavity is full of bacteria and is a good environment for bacterial growth. Rinse the mouth after each meal. Brush your teeth with a fluoride-containing toothpaste twice a day – before breakfast and before you go to bed. Cleaning the mouth with twigs is possible if done carefully. In addition to regular brushing, it is advisable to floss your teeth at least once a day, usually before you go to bed. The cleanliness of our hands is very important in all our daily activities. After that PHP team elaborated the importance of hand washing with soap and its steps, as well as critical timings to wash the hands with soap. In our normal activities our hands frequently get dirty. There are many situations in which microorganisms are likely to attach to our hands along with the dirt. There are many communicable diseases that follow the route of faeco-oral transmission. Hand hygiene plays a critically important role in preventing this transmission. Hygienic hand washing involves the mechanical removal of microorganisms from contaminated hand surfaces using soap or detergent. Hand washing should involve more than a quick rinse under a tap (faucet) or in running water. Further PHP team asked me to demonstrate the steps of hand washing with soap, I demonstrated these steps in front of all participants:
• First wet your hands with clean water and lather with a bar of soap.

• Next rub your hands together vigorously and scrub all surfaces up to your wrists.

• Clean under your fingernails.

• Continue for 15–30 seconds or about the length of a little tune (for example, the ‘Happy Birthday’ song). It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs.

• Rinse your hands well with clean running water (pour from a jug or tap).

• Dry your hands in the air to avoid recontamination on a dirty towel – do not touch anything until your hands are dry.

• Wood ash will also rub off any dirt and smells. The slight irritation you feel when you wash your hands with ash shows the cleansing power of ash.

• Local seeds such as indod (Lemma’s plant), which are known to be good cleaning agents, can also be used for regular hand washing.

• Clean sand with water can be used for hand washing to help to rub off dirt.

As well as the critical timings to wash the hands also delivered:

• After using the toilet (or disposing of human or animal faeces)

• After changing a baby’s diaper (nappy) and disposing of the faeces.

• Immediately after touching raw food when preparing meals (e.g. chicken or other meat).

• Before preparing and handling cooked/ready-to-eat food.

• Before eating food or feeding children.

• After contact with contaminated surfaces (e.g. rubbish bins, cleaning cloths, food-contaminated surfaces).

• After handling pets and domestic animals.

• After wiping or blowing the nose or sneezing into the hands (respiratory hygiene).

• After handling soiled tissues (you’re own or others’, e.g. children).

Miss Bemla added that SAFWCO team organized Hygiene sessions twice in our village and they are succeeded to realize the people regarding the importance of hygiene and its good practices but there was dire need to trigger them on daily basis for that I have been conducting sessions in each household as well as demonstrate the good practices, I started it from my home ensured the hygienic practices among the children, my younger daughter usually had severe diarrhea since then she looks healthy and feels healthy and now bring them during session as a role model, mostly mothers have adopted the practices of hygiene and those who has not adopted yet feel shy and ensure to adopt the good practices of hygiene. I started it as individually now I have group of ladies who have been trying to get rid of these
infectious and viral diseases from the village, we all have taken oath to ensure our village clean and free from these diseases, our community has been cooperating and their response is positive it enhances our confidence as well as our dignity, social and economical value is increased. I started it from myself but now its spread in whole village I am satisfied from my conscience and remain continues this strive and combat to make our village more prosperous and clean.