



# Waves of Change

A Photo Story on Safe WASH Program in Achham



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## Note from the Chair

Social Empowerment and Building Accessibility Center, Nepal (SEBAC-Nepal) is a national NGO which works for community development and infrastructure building in the rural areas besides launching various programs in the underprivileged communities. We aim to work in all the districts which are lagging behind in sectors like education, health, women empowerment among others. So far we have expanded our outreach to 20 districts from all five development regions—eastern, western, central, mid-western, and far-western—with programs that cover sustainable livelihoods, natural resources management, community infrastructure and water supply, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation among others. We aim to further expand our programs in the days ahead.

Water and Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) program has remained a key area of work for SEBAC-Nepal. As such we have launched this program in various districts of the country, for obvious reasons. Drinking water and sanitation are directly linked with community health, which is directly linked with community's development status. Thus WASH program has the objective of laying the foundation for development in the community. Our drive for enhancing sanitation situation in the rural communities found greater support and cooperation from organizations like CARE Nepal and UNICEF with which we worked in the past projects. The current initiative was funded and supported by USAID. We are thankful to this organization.

SEBAC-Nepal's initiatives in the far-western districts have met with pleasant rewards. A number of VDCs in the region have become open defecation free and several others are in the process of being declared so. And our experience in Achham district in particular remained extremely inspiring. The fact that it is the first district in the Far-west to go ODF speaks for itself. And we believe this district will set an example to replicate for other districts in the Far-west. This photo story book represents key reflections on the hardships and miseries the Achham folks have been going through, their desire for development, how WASH program progressed and the waves of change it helped to bring in otherwise backward villages of the Far-west.

Remanta Nath  
Chairperson  
SEBAC–Nepal

## MESSAGE

Water, sanitation and hygiene program of Achham district has become an example to replicate for all other districts of the country. With the success of this campaign, it has also redefined the old notion of development: Development is not only related with building of roads and schools, it has as much to do with hygiene and sanitation conditions as well. Perhaps this is the most positive message SEBAC-Nepal's Safe WASH program has been able to deliver.

Obviously, Achham is still battling through several problems. The district which lagged far behind in development front for several years, however, has started to take a shift toward awakening in awareness, empowerment and development. Safe WASH program played a vital role to change the situations on these fronts. Besides, it has added to self-esteem and confidence of the people. This is no small achievement for Achham. Achham owes a great deal to its local political leaders and cadres, local organizations, members of civil society, other stakeholders and the people for this success. This success would not have materialized without their collective efforts.

At a time when water and sanitation has become burning global concern, SEBAC-Nepal's Safe WASH program has set an example in Achham district not only by contributing to its ODF status and but also by helping in improving water, sanitation and hygiene status of the entire district. This however is no time for complacency. There is much to do in sanitation and hygiene sectors though the district has gone ODF. I hope SEBAC-Nepal's post-ODF initiatives will be able to address the remaining challenges.

**Bishnu Prasad Koirala**  
Local Development Officer  
DDC, Achham

## Foreword

Water and sanitation has become a grave concern across the globe, especially among the third world countries. A number of people lose lives to water borne diseases in the South Asian region. Nepal is no exception. Children and adults succumb to such diseases not only in the remote villages of the Far-west but also in Kathmandu. In this context, Safe WASH program implemented by SEBAC-Nepal has proved to be great boon to people of Achham. Achham used to be counted as the poorest district until 1997. And deaths due to cholera and diarrhea were common. The district still has to struggle with wrenching poverty and widespread unemployment.

Amidst this, the success of Safe WASH has brought a wave of positive change in this far-flung district. The program not only supported in turning the district into ODF but also brought huge change in people's behaviors in hygiene and health. Each household in the district has toilet of its own and cases of water borne diseases have gone down drastically.

Encouragingly, Safe WASH also contributed to abolishing Chhaupadi system which has become the scourge of the Far-west. Several Chhaupadi sheds have been converted into toilets. Payal VDC is its example. Other VDCs are following into Payal's footsteps.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Coordination committees have been formed in both district and village levels. These committees have been working to enrich and bring our programs to the grassroots level. The photo stories in this publication represent safe WASH learning and reflections.

**BB Thapa**  
Executive Director  
SEBAC-Nepal



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## Water and Sanitation Campaign

Water and Sanitation Campaign has brought a significant change in sanitation situation of Achham district. Achham is the first district from the Far-western region to be declared open defecation free zone. Sanitation campaign that started from individual households of the community has now reached every village and town of the district, setting an example for other districts to replicate. This district of a backward region, which is still lagging behind in other fronts, has had exemplary success in sanitation field.





## Journey to sanitation

Achham is plagued by several ills and problems. Wrenching poverty forces the poor to leave for Indian cities and towns for earning livelihood. But there is something positive amidst this dark reality. Achham is the first district in the Far-west to become the open defecation-free district. The campaign had started around five years ago from Hattikot village. So far all 75 VDCs of the district have become open defecation free villages. Only 6.33 households had toilets in Achham until 2009. Five years down, the district boasts toilet for each household.

**"Toilet has become an essential need for us. No one in this village can imagine life without toilet. Now it's become a prestige issue for us."**

**- Parvati Kunwar  
Siddeshwar -2, Achham**



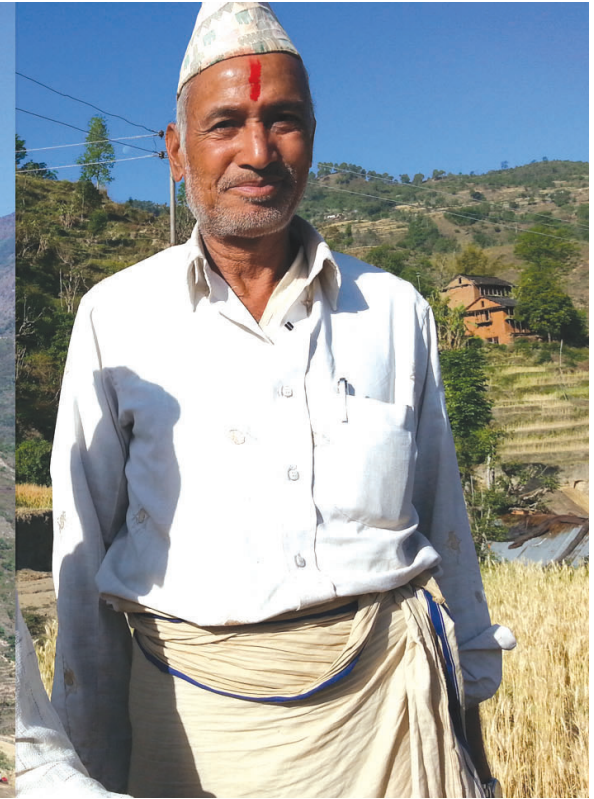
### Gone are the days

Foul smell wafted around the settlements in Achham's Siddeshwar VDC. Filth and stench had become village's identity, almost. One would come across open defecation spots about everywhere. Not so any more. Along with anti-public defecation campaign, process of toilet building has started.

Now the lanes and footpaths have become cleaner. Drinking water project was launched in the village under SEBAC-Nepal's initiative. With access to water, it has enabled villagers to keep the toilets cleaner. And it has greatly helped to reduce cases of diarrhea and other diseases. Local Female Community Volunteer Kala Budha succinctly reflects on this change: "Gone are the days when we had to live with stench and filth."

**"With the village becoming open defecation free, we feel like our life moving toward light from the tunnel of darkness. It has changed the situation of the village and the way we think and behave."**

**- Rewanta Kunwar  
Siddeshwar Drinking Water User  
Group, Achham**



## Specter of the past

Balbahadur Kunwar used to tell his students in class: “Never defecate in the open, maintain hygiene. Every family must build a toilet of its own.” But sadly the retired school teacher's house had no toilet. A number of village children would die of diarrhea owing to lack of toilet. Kunwar remembers this fact very well. So he says: “May the specter of the past never haunt our present.”

**"Toilet has become the issue of self-esteem now. Even those who built big houses did not build toilets in the past. These days even small house owners build toilets. This has given the message of good manners."**

**- Krishna Bahadur Budha  
Siddeshwar, Achham**



## Great relief

With toilet in each household, the entire village looks clean and tidy. It has also contributed to cleanliness in the whole community. The number of patients visiting local health centers during the dry season—when people are more vulnerable to diarrhea—have gone down significantly. Surat Khadka, the person in charge of Health Post cannot agree more: “Our record shows significant cut in rate of patients visiting us complaining of diarrhea. Cleanliness and use of toilet could have helped to bring about this change.” It has also rid the female community volunteers working at health posts of stress. Maheshwari Kunwar, a Female Community Health Volunteer(FCHV), says: “We would be rushing around each household distributing dehydration package jiban jal in the past. We don’t have to do so now.”

**"We will never ever go to rivers and rivulets to defecate. We made toilets ourselves. We know how to maintain and care for them. We must."**

**- Hima Budha  
Siddeshwar, Achham**



## Toilet at 74

Maha Singh Hudke is well over 64 and physically challenged. Even as other households in Payal village were building toilets, he could not make one for his family because of poverty. But Drinking Water and Cleanliness Committee of Payal VDC-5 offered assistance to Maha Singh for building toilet, making him the owner of toilet for the first time. Maha Singh shares his experience: "Physically challenged, I have fallen down on the ground several nights while going out to respond to call of nature. Now that I have a toilet nearby, I won't have to face such troubles any more. I am using toilet for the first time at this age of 74."

"Those in comfortable position must help those with no means. It was imperative for each household to build toilet of its own so as to make the village open defecation free. We looked for a way out to reach this end. And with its own initiative the village itself has helped the poor to build toilets."

- Deepak Kunwar  
Head Teacher, Vaidhanath Higher  
Secondary School



## Support for a cause

Before Sanitation program gained momentum in Siddeshwar VDC, only 180 of total 1161 households had toilets of their own. Remaining 980 households had no access to toilets. Villages like Mastamandu, Nawathana, Budhakot, Patakot, Duni, Jalpadevi, Lungra, Baijanath, and Ridikot had the same problem. In fact, they first saw toilets only after sanitation campaign started. In the recent times, 10 VDCs of this district have greatly benefitted from Safe WASH Program launched in financial assistance of USAID. It has contributed to turning Achham into an anti-public defecation district.

**"In the beginning open defecation program felt like a tough job. But we all the stakeholders in the district worked together and made the campaign successful. Now we need to properly monitor it and ensure that the campaign endures."**

**- Krishna Prasad Jaishi  
Former Chairperson  
District Development Committee,  
Achham**

## Infrastructure Development

A number of drinking water projects were carried out along with Water and Sanitation Campaign. Besides, public toilets were built and household toilets for the families from the poor and deprived class were also built under USAID funded Safe WASH program's initiatives. Drinking water crisis remains a major challenge for cleanliness and sanitation management. SEBAC-Nepal has lent its hand in drinking water projects, community participation in repair and maintenance of completed structures, skill enhancement trainings, orientation and other activities. All these programs had the objective of addressing severe water crisis.





### **No worries**

Drinking water crisis had literally crippled daily lives of women folks in Mastamadau VDC-4, Accham. It would be worse during the dry season for they had to walk a long distance to fetch water. But ever since they made a small pool by collecting water from the wetlands nearby and piped it to village, they have felt a sense of respite. Bimala Kunwar, a local says, "This pool has saved us our time. It has reduced our work load greatly and also saved us from going far to fetch water every day. And most of all, it has helped the villagers to keep their toilets clean."

**"Planning alone does not make any sense. We need to give continuity to the program. We have thought of making this program enduring by forming Committee for Repair and Maintenance."**

**- Ganesh Lohar, Secretary  
Sim Drinking Water User Committee,  
Mastamandau**



### **Call for public toilets**

Situated at Duni VDC of Achham, Chaukhutte bazaar is a rural market town bordering Achham and Doti districts. All buses en route to Achham and Bajura districts stop here, contributing to increasing cross flow of people. Thus, there was an urgent need for a public toilet. This need has been served after SEBAC-Nepal built a public toilet as part of its 'safe wash program.' It has solved the problems of open defecation in this area. But Chief of Chaukhutte Police Post, Ram Datta Joshi thinks more needs to be done: "If we want to turn villages and towns into open defecation free areas, we must build public toilets."

**"Having toilet in each household alone does not make the village clean. Only when we have public toilets in places with higher mobility of people, will entire village be clean."**

**- Sanidevi Saud  
Duni Achham**



### Handling with care

Members of drinking water user groups in Achham are well aware about need to preserve and carefully handle structures of drinking water stalls and toilets. The committees formed in the earlier stage of project have now started a fund for repair and maintenance. No one understands the usefulness of such fund better than Krishna Bahadur Budha, the head of Siddeshwar Mul Drinking Water Committee. "Committee's activeness and repair and maintenance fund are the best methods to save the structures."

"We faced immense hardships in getting drinking water in the past. Those hard days have gone for good. With toilet in each household and water taps in the community, villagers have greatly benefitted. Without water taps, life was pretty hard."

- Dharu Budha  
Siddeshwar, Achham



## Water in the yard

Both teachers and students of Baijanath Higher Secondary School at Payal VDC in Achham were hit hard by lack of drinking water facility. Thus school had made a kind of rule to address this situation. The school formed groups of students—each group comprising five members—and assigned them, in turns, to fetch water from the nearby sources. This had seriously hampered studies of the students. Ironically, the school that had been upgraded to higher secondary level still had no access to drinking water. But students and teachers have not had this problem for the last one year after SEBAC-Nepal built a drinking water tap as part of its Safe WASH program under USAID's financial assistance. With supply right down to the school yard, it has also helped school administration in carrying out construction of new building. Deepak Kunwar, the school principal, says this: "In lack of access to water, we had to face a lot of problems. No more so. We have felt a relief from a great stress."

**"Chhau sheds were like a big curse for us women. There were times when women could not use toilets during menstruation. It seems such days are going to come to an end."**

**- Bhajan kunwar  
Jalpadevi, Achham**

## Awareness building

Raising public awareness is fundamental aspect of Water and Sanitation Campaign. Today people practice the slogan "let's make our toilet ourselves; we who have built our houses ourselves can also build toilet." This wave of awareness has reached virtually every corner of the district. Each household has built a toilet for itself and this has contributed to making the district open defecation free. All the stakeholders of the district worked actively to raise public awareness. Schools, Village Development Committees and other district-based development organizations also played vital role to make the mission successful.





## Two in one

Chhaupadi system, in which menstruating women are subjected to live in isolation for at least a week in cowshed or small huts, has hindered social reforms in the mid-western and far-western regions of the county. Little wonder it had posed a challenge to anti-public defecation campaign as well. As the women would defecate in the open during the menstruation period, foul smell would pervade. But anti-Chhaupadi drive, which is gaining a momentum, is helping to solve this problem slowly. Like most other villages, Payal VDC has also declared itself a Chhaupadi-free village. The member and volunteer of the paralegal committee of the village, Baijanti Kunwar says: " We have replicated anti-open defecation program and are conducting anti-Chhaupadi drive."

**"With no source of drinking water, students had to face a lot of problems. Now with drinking water facility and toilet, they have felt a great relief."**

**- Maya Kunwar  
Member, Paralegal Committee,  
Payal**



## Cultural awakening

Local dance and songs such as Deuda proved to be effective means to spread message of hygiene and toilet use before and during the campaign. Such cultural events served twofold purposes: They provided entertainment to viewers and more importantly educated people about health benefits of using toilets. It helped to raise public awareness to a great deal. Damayanti Kunwar, a local resident of Payal VDC thinks cultural events were instrumental in garnering wider participation of people to the campaign. "Great many people would participate in those cultural events," she reminisces.

**"Cultural performance like Deuda dancne was instrumental in making this program successful. Greater participation of people was a chief attraction of the program."**

**- Jamuna Kunwar  
Payal, Achham**



### **Adieu Chhau sheds!**

"Chhau sheds have closed down and with it great deal of hardships the women had to undergo has come to an end." So says Bima Koli of Payal VDC, Achham. She no longer has to live in seclusion in Chhau during menstruation. Ratan Kunwar, sitting by Bima, still remembers those bad days. She says she has not had to live in Chhau for several years now but she is aware about the pains and miseries other women have to go through. Those five days of menstruation period would almost be like hell breaking down, she says. But now the village has become Chhaupadi free. Payal VDC has played a vital role in eliminating Chhau sheds not only in Achham but also in other mid-western and far-western districts.

**"There was a source of water down there. But we would defecate just above it. We must have consumed a lot of contamination. May such days never come back!"**

**- Tilu Budha  
Siddeshwar, Achham**



### **Yes, women can**

Drinking water and sanitation committees of Accham district worked hand in hand with sanitation campaign in the district. Men led such committees in most of the villages but Laxmi Shah is the head of the committee in Baijanath VDC. It was quite hard for Laxmi to inspire people to build toilets when they had been doing without it for generations. But Laxmi worked hand in hand with other members and accomplished the task. Each household has a toilet of its own in the village. And the committee monitors the toilet use as well. Laxmi has this to say: "Many had doubted I would be able to accomplish the task, because I am a woman. But now they have understood that even women can do it well."

**"Accham has been preparing a post-open defecation work plan as well. Under this initiative there is a plan to make each VDC Chhaupadi free besides strongly encouraging people to use toilets."**

**- Indira Ojha  
Women Development Officer**

## Behavioral Change

It's vital to change people's behavior in the community to improve the sanitation status. In this respect, Water and Sanitation Campaign of Achham district was instrumental in changing people's behavior. More needs to be done to ensure absolute cleanliness and satisfactory sanitary conditions but things have changed a great deal compared to the past.





### **Sanitation pride**

Do things like lavatories and restrooms have anything to do with a person's self esteem and social reputation of a place? May be not for all. But it is so for Mansara Kunwar. She is filled with pride to see each household of her village build toilet of its own. She finds a world of difference between sanitary condition of Siddeswar village five years ago and now. The village that did without latrines for the last 60 years has now made toilet integral part of living. Mansara built hers by the side of a rivulet. "I felt pretty awkward when I used it for the first time", she says. But she adds that toilet has become a part and parcel of the village and has also added to village's reputation.

**"Toilet has become a part and parcel of our village, we cannot do without it."**

**- Dharali Lohar  
Mastamandu, Achham**



### Standing for a cause

Puran Auji and Mohan Auji come from Dalit community of Timalsen VDC in Achham. Playing traditional musical instruments during cultural and religious events such as weddings and festivals has remained their main profession. When such works are in short supply they leave for India to find jobs. They are well aware of toilet building campaign in the village. They feel that this campaign has boosted their self-esteem. Mohan Auji says: "We must support such initiatives." "Everyone must inculcate the habits of using toilets," rejoins Puran Auji

"Nothing is impossible if we have a will. Though we are lagging behind on several other fronts, we poor people in Achham made toilets for the first time."

- Mohan Auji  
Timalsen, Achham



### **Chhau shed turns into toilet**

Jana Sunar is the resident of Lungra VDC, Achham. As toilet building campaign was gaining momentum in her village, Jana was taken by worries: Where would she build one for her household? She had a very small piece of land around. Meanwhile, a campaign to eliminate Chhaupadi sheds was making a significant progress in the village. Just then an idea crossed her mind: She would turn her Chhaupadi shed into toilet. And she lived up to this idea. "Instead of demolishing Chhau shed, I thought it would be better to turn it into toilet building," says Jana Sunar.

**"Chhau sheds were caves of darkness. They are being destroyed. We hope we will see light now."**

**- Maina Kunwar  
Lungra, Achham**



## Wave of awakening

As open defecation free campaign was gaining momentum in Achham, it felt like celebrations at times. People discussed the need to make toilets during the gatherings in public places, which finally encouraged the community people to build toilets themselves. Not that toilet was entirely a new thing for the district. Toilets built through government and non-government initiatives have remained unused for long. But once SEBAC-Nepal ODF started the campaign, it raised a great awakening in people. The public discussion taking place in Patalkot of the district proves it.

"The program has been able to deliver the message that 'we can make toilets ourselves.' This in itself is a key achievement. This has been possible through community's realization for need of toilets and the help of the concerned stakeholders to achieve this goal."

- Dr. Ram Bahadur KC  
Chief District Public Health Office

## Coordination and Support

By working in close collaboration with local stakeholders, SEBAC-Nepal has set an example that several goals can be achieved at a time if worked in a broader coordination with concerned stakeholders. All the stakeholders of the district—District Health Office, District Development Committee among others—lent active support throughout the program. In VDC level, the Village Drinking Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee remained a great supporter to the campaign. This success, which could be possible through mutual cooperation and partnership among various stakeholders—can also be replicated in other fields, not just in drinking water and sanitation programs.





## Wind of change

Payal VDC of Achham is virtually a village without men as most men leave for neighboring India searching for manual jobs. Due to deviation in sexual behavior while in India, most men contract HIV/AIDS and import the deadly disease home when they return. About a dozen of people have lost their lives to HIV/AIDS so far and dozens of other men and women are battling through the scourge. In the recent days, however, a level of awareness has taken hold in this village. Along with sanitation campaign, people have become more aware about HIV/AIDS. Sita BK, the facilitator at Payal VDC, says: "Things have changed to a great deal. People have become much more aware about HIV threats."

**"Alone, one cannot do much. Achham has been able to set an example for the whole country through collective efforts. We all worked together."**

**- Krishna Giri  
Assistant Chief District Officer,  
Achham**



## School of help

Schools played a key role in transforming Achham into an open defecation free district. Schools played the role of pressure group to pressure school parents to build toilets compulsorily. As the students came from the same community itself, schools could spread the message through students as well. It added a building block to the campaign for building toilets. Jagadish Kunwar, Head Teacher of Prabha Dhankot Higher Secondary School says: "Schools extended full support to this campaign. Even we took it as a development effort."

"There has been significant decrease in cases of water borne diseases such as diarrhea, abdominal pains and typhoid. Records in our health post support this."

- Kamal Saud  
Senior Health Worker  
Health Post, Duni, Achham



### **Working together**

"We have taken health and hygiene as fundamental conditions for development. Perhaps the VDC had not understood importance of this program in the past. But we held it as the most vital aspect and moved ahead with it." Khagendra Khadka, VDC secretary of Duni VDC has this to say.

Khadka feels that change in the village is outcome of collective work of entire village to make it open defecation free. Initiatives of toilet making launched by the government and non-governmental organizations had not gained steam in the past. But this particular one launched by SEBAC-Nepal has met with resounding success. The project met its objective after 37 poor households were provided with building materials from VDC and community members donated labor for free.

**"I take this toilet as my own. We were sick of having to go to the rivers for defecation. Now we have got to use safe and clean toilets."**

**- Chandra Raut  
Siddeshwor, Achham**



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