

Students to create awareness on sanitation, hygiene in UP

WASH AMBASSADORS Global think tank mobilizes students from 50 schools in Mirzapur, 30 in Faizabad, 20 in Varanasi and 8 in Jhansi

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LUCKNOW: School students in Uttar Pradesh have now decided to spearhead the movement to create awareness on clean drinking water, proper toilet facilities and hygiene needs of children. For this purpose, 1000 student ambassadors have been mobilized in four districts of the state after a two-year long WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) in Schools Programme in the state.

One such ambassador is Karishma, a 14-year student of Kissan Intermediate College (Varanasi), who hails from a small village Asab. From a quiet girl sitting in the corner at the beginning of the campaign, Karishma is now leading the WASH assessment in her community. Karishma and her four friends have formed a cleanliness group. They go from door to door to create awareness about good hygiene practices.

Motivated by the results, with the village panchayat's support they have also started organising monthly meetings to create awareness about different WASH issues. This has been made possible by the



■ Garbage strewn around near crossings is the order of the day. (Left) Passengers don't even spare the platform sheds and spit on them.

DEEPAK GUPTA/HT PHOTOS



participation of teachers, students and grass roots NGOs in WASH in Schools Programme of Development Alternatives (DA), a global think tank.

These young ambassadors were appointed after a two-year project intervention in 108 schools of three districts of Uttar Pradesh. These include 50 schools in Mirzapur; 30 schools in Faizabad, 20 schools in Varanasi and 8 schools in Jhansi.

NGOs like People's Action for National Integration (PANI) and Society for Social Action and Research (SSAR) were also involved in the project.

The idea of preparing young ambassadors is going to have significant impact towards creating awareness at the household and community levels. Each child can effectively reach and influence 50 individuals in her/his community, essentially reaching about 10 households. With over 60% of India's population lacking access to sanitation facilities, the ripple effect created by children in schools can be very effective in creating a healthy, gender equal and developed India.

SANITATION CHALLENGE IN SCHOOLS

According to the National Family Health Survey, in India, out of the approximate 0.63 million rural schools, only 44% have water supply. A majority of the schools in India lacks basic sanitation facilities; only 50% of government schools have toilets and four out of ten government schools do not have separate toilets for girls.

In UP, only 75% schools have separate toilet facilities for the girl child and only 30% of the toilets are 'usable'. A majority of schools not only carries the risk of disease, but also risk of sexual harassment due to existing gaps in sanitation infrastructure.

"By supporting good health, hygiene and dignity at this formative stage in a child's life, there can be several positive outcomes like reduction in drop-out rate especially of girl children, promoting gender equality by fostering a sanitation structure for the girl child and sensitising the community to take action towards demanding safe water and toilet facilities. Educational achievement is closely linked to school attendance. School attendance for girls, particularly after puberty, is in turn greatly influenced by the availability of functioning toilets and sanitation facilities. This is basic right of every girl. Moreover, as studies have shown, a 10% increase in female literacy can contribute as much as 0.3% additional growth in the national economy," says Zeenat Niazi, vice president, Development Alternatives.

WASH in School programme fosters a behaviour change supported by availability and accessibility of appropriate infrastructure.

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