

Turning Swachh Bharat Mission into a Mass Movement

Feature
World Toilet Day

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Over 2.5 billion people mostly in rural areas across the world do not have proper sanitation facilities and over one billion people defecate in the open due to lack of proper toilet facilities. The situation is no better in our country where more than half of the population defecates in the open.

It is well known that countries where open defecation is most widely practiced are the same countries with the highest numbers of under-five child deaths, high levels of under-nutrition and poverty, and large wealth disparities.

Realising that the large scale population was exposed to various kinds of diseases due to lack of sanitation facilities the government of India has advanced the earlier target of making India free from open defecation by 2022 to 2019 by launching a massive Swachh Bharat Mission. 2019 coincides with the 150th Jayanti Birth Anniversary year of Mahatama Gandhi who considered sanitation more important than even Independence.

An Action plan has been drawn up to make India Open Defecation Free (ODF) by 2019, to keep villages clean through construction of individual, cluster & community toilets and through solid and liquid waste management with active participation of village Gram Panchayats (GPs). It also aims at enabling water tap make connection to households on demand by 2019.

The Action plan is centered around the major issues:

1. Strengthening delivery mechanism by creating necessary infrastructure and
2. Launching a massive awareness programme involving all stake holders to make the Swachh Bharat Mission into a mass movement.

NATIONAL REACHOUT CAMPAIGN

What is really of prime importance is changing the mindset of the people who are habituated to defecate in the open, even those who have toilets. To bring in behavioral change is the biggest challenge before the government. A National Reachout Campaign has been unleashed towards this end.

The measures include:

A continuous door to door contact with every rural household in the country on the lines of the Pulse Polio campaign so that the people can be made aware of the importance of using a toilet and the consequences of not doing so.

Launching of a National and State Level Media campaign making use of audio visual, mobile telephony and local outreach programmes to communicate the message.

Involvement of Social, Local, Sports or Movie Icons in Sanitation messaging. Already cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar and many movie stars have joined the campaign.

Community Mobilization is an important step to turn the campaign into a mass movement. It is not just the involvement of ASHA workers, Self Help Groups and other NGOs which is already being done but also using School children as a medium to influence families.

Involving school children as messengers of Change on 'WASH' – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene and including inputs in the school curriculum till Class X. Holding of rallies, walk/run for sanitation, seminars, painting competitions & other activities in Schools to disseminate the sanitation message are being organized in a big way – facebook page of 'Swachh Bharat Mission' and facebook page of Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation provide a glimpse of all these activities.

Getting Doctors, teachers, local political and religious leaders involved in the Sanitation Communication, is also part of this Mission approach.

In fact, it involves using every tool available to spread the message of sanitation including using fitting vehicles with publicity material on sanitation and drinking water supply; showing short films on Sanitation as well as best practices.

The vehicles like trucks could also carry models of twin pit latrines; rural sanitary pans with p-traps and models for water supply schemes.

Wall Paintings, shows during weekly haats/ market/ school/ chaupals through Self Help Groups (SHGs). Also making use of the popular Folk Media like puppet shows, nukkad nataks to create awareness.

Involvement of various organizations in the mass communication plan like the UNICEF, WSP, WATERAID, WHO, ADB, Rotary India, Sulabh and the vast network of non-governmental workers as well as corporate sectors. The assistance of some of these institutions has successfully been utilized in the Pulse polio campaign.

Another important step proposed in the action plan is setting up of at least one Model Community Sanitary Complex (CSC) to begin with, in each of the 6000 Blocks in the country as an IEC tool.

STRENGTHENING DELIVERY MECHANISM

While the mass media can create awareness and bring changes in attitude, what is significant is the creation of necessary infra structure for construction of toilets in the villages and laying of pipe lines for supply of water in a time bound manner, this involves the provision of material and adequate funding.

The Action plan proposes the use of Revolving Funds in construction linked-instalments to provide advance to poor households who cannot afford initial construction cost or to Gram Panchayats in construction linked instalments to be finally recouped against incentives released on completion of the toilets.

Increased Finance Commission transfers for this purpose may be considered to ensure maintenance of School, Anganwadis and Community Sanitation Complexes, which is very poor due to paucity of O&M funds.

Linkage of funds released to GPs under all programmes, could be linked with coverage and usage of toilets in the GP, to use it as a leverage to ensure Swachh Bharat by 2019.

Steps proposed for supply of material for construction include:

1. Ensuring availability of sanitary hardware suitable for rural areas in adequate quantity and in reasonable prices. Availability of Deeper angle rural pans with water seal p-traps which consume lesser water shall be ensured.
2. Creation of Rural Sanitary Marts/ Production Centres in every Block in the country.
3. Completing the supply of material like cement, pan, bricks etc through provision of exchangeable coupons, with labour contribution by beneficiaries.

4. Training of Masons in the construction of sanitary toilets across the country to be taken up in a focused manner. For this leading NGOs could be roped in sanitation, ITIs/ Polytechnics who could create an Army of trained Masons specializing in sanitation construction.
5. Involvement of Corporate sector to assist in covering the GPs in their Catchment areas for sanitation especially Community Sanitary Complexes, either directly or through CSR funding. The corporate may also look after O&M for a couple of years.
6. To ensure the interest of the District, Sub-district and Block Level Government officers beginning from District Magistrates in sanitation, the achievements of their areas under sanitation may be included in their APRs (Annual Performance Reports).

It was in 2013 that the UN officially recognized November 19 as World Toilet Day to make sanitation for all, a global development priority to promote public awareness of the need for adequate toilets in order to improve health of people and save lives. Describing the practice of open-air defecation as “extremely harmful” to public health, the UN says that the lives of more than 200,000 children could be saved with the provision of proper toilets facilities.

The 2014 campaign of World Toilet Day is centered around the theme of “Dignity and Equality” because women and girls bear the greatest burden of lack of toilet access throughout all life stages; Lack of toilets in schools leads to increase in dropout rates amongst girls and open defecation by girls exposes them to sexual harassment, assault and violence.

So in order to save millions of lives, to provide dignity girls & to women the need is to ensure that men and women have equal right over sanitation and water facilities.

A momentum in the Swatchh Bharat Mission has already been created across the country, the need is to sustain it, ensure that the campaign becomes a movement of the masses, translated into action and a Swatchh Bharat becomes a reality by 2019 as a tribute the Father of the Nation Mahatama Gandhi.

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Nov 19 is being celebrated as ‘World Toilet Day’

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