

The Swachh Bharat Mission: Everyone's Business

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Halfway into the implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), a lot of momentum has been built up and significant progress has been made. The Mission is slowly transforming into a Jan Andolan, as was envisaged by the Prime Minister when he first spoke about it from the ramparts of the Red Fort. Since the launch of the programme in October 2014, the sanitation coverage in rural India has gone up from 42 per cent to over 63 per cent, the number of people defecating in the open in rural India has come down from about 550 million to about 350 million, 190,000 villages, 130 districts and three states have become Open Defecation Free (ODF). The programme is now well on track to achieve an ODF India by October 2, 2019.

Prioritizing sanitation is critical for multiple reasons. The lack of sanitation is the leading cause of diarrhoea among children under five, leading to stunting among children and also results in several preventable child deaths. Sanitation is also critical for the safety and dignity of women. With India making massive strides towards becoming an economic super power, ending the practice of open defecation is absolutely imperative.

Unlike earlier era sanitation programmes, the SBM is not a toilet construction programme but a behaviour change mass movement. It is relatively easy to build a road, bridge or an airport but trying to change human behaviour is complex and if you are trying to change the behaviour of half a billion people by persuading them to stop doing something that they have been doing throughout their lives - defecating in the open, and start using toilets, the sheer scale of the operation makes it a gargantuan task. While mass media campaigns are useful, the real key to bringing about behaviour change on the ground is to have grassroots-level trained and incentivized motivators using interpersonal communication with villages and households to “trigger” demand for toilets and cleanliness. States and districts across the country are rapidly increasing the number of motivators but this has to be accelerated even further, the plan being to have over half a million “boots on the ground”, on average one per village across the country.

The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) supports the States for better implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission through initiatives in capacity building, human resources, behaviour change communication, knowledge sharing and monitoring

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and evaluation, among others. Initiatives like the Swachh Sangrah, the knowledge portal for SBM for districts and States to share best practices, and Virtual Classrooms to train hundreds of motivators across multiple locations are examples of systematic integration of technology into the program as well. Additionally, various national and State level workshops and events are regularly organized to bring all stakeholders together to learn from, and inspire each other. Grassroots leaders like sarpanches, especially women, are playing an increasingly pivotal role in accelerating progress. The recently concluded Swachh Shakti event on March 8, Women's Day, brought together 6000 women sarpanches from across India to celebrate their success in the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM). Addressing the gathering at Gandhinagar, the Prime Minister lauded the leadership role of women sarpanches in the SBM as well as in other flagship programmes like *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*. He also awarded women Swachhta Champions who have been an inspiration to members of their communities.

In addition to making the SBM a people's movement, it is also critical to demystify toilet technology and practices. The most "appropriate" technology for rural areas, in terms of cost, sustainability and reuse, is the twin-pit model. While this model is the predominant one in rural India, and is effective in most contexts, more efforts and marketing needs to be done to persuade rural households to adopt it. Emptying one (while it is closed) of the two toilet pits by the householder himself is also a simple, safe and environmentally friendly task, with the organic compost generated ideal for agricultural purposes. The more frequently senior officials and eminent personalities empty toilet pits themselves as examples to others, the more rural households will be persuaded to do it themselves and the faster will be the adoption of the twin pit technology.

Beyond behaviour change and appropriate technology practices, it is also crucial that Swachhta becomes "everyone's business". To this end, all



sectors, including the private sector, are increasingly becoming involved to mainstream sanitation into their core work. The private sector is stepping up to the plate, an example of which is the Tata Trusts volunteering to recruit and finance 600 young professionals, one for each district in India, to support Collectors in accelerating SBM. In the public sector, on the Prime Minister's initiative, in addition to celebrating "Swachhta Pakhwaras" every fortnight, each Central Ministry has prepared a Swachhta Action Plan (SAP) including a budget line, which will integrate sanitation in their main line of business. An estimated Rs 5000 crores has been earmarked for Swachhta-related activities by all Ministries in 2017-18. Cleaning up of iconic places, such as the Golden Temple and Tirupati Temple, to international standards and of the gram panchayats along the Ganga are other examples of Swachhta being mainstreamed in other sectors and spaces.

One of the most crucial elements of the SBM is the verification and sustaining of results. This is especially important for the credibility of the programme. Currently, a multi-tier process is being followed, with district-level, state-level and national-level third party verification being carried out. These efforts will need to be strengthened and mainstreamed in the days ahead. In addition, the sustaining of ODF is also crucial since its achievement is not conceived of as a one-off exercise, unlike earlier government programmes. Achieving ODF status is one thing

but sustaining it through creation of local mechanisms and incentives is another. A sustainability protocol has been developed by the MDWS together with the states and this needs to be effectively implemented. The Ministry also has a robust MIS which tracks progress down to the individual household level. This MIS, along with the Swachh App, is in the public domain.

Effective Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) is also a critical part of the Mission. Work on SLWM has been commenced in several villages in the country, with a focus on the ones which have already achieved ODF status. A Village Swachhta Index has been developed by the MDWS, where villages self-score themselves on overall cleanliness, and measure their progress against this score going forward. The index comprising of ODF status, SLWM status and general visual cleanliness helps a village go to ODF+ which is the natural next phase after achieving ODF.

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