Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) Immersive Research

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Developed by the Immersion Research Team from Institute of Development Studies, Praxis and WaterAid

Policy and practice note

PRAXIS | IDS Institute of Development Studies | WaterAid

Introduction

The Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G) immersive research was carried out by the senior researchers from Praxis along with WaterAid and the Institute of Development Studies. In April, the researchers spent three nights and up to four days in each of a total of eight villages in Madhya Pradesh (3), Uttar Pradesh (2) and Rajasthan (3), in districts which had been declared open defecation free (ODF). The aim was to gain in-depth qualitative insights relevant for SBM-G, starting with an agenda of questions and issues and then exploring new topics that emerged as significant throughout the research. The insights gathered help raise critical questions, without necessarily providing definitive answers. A detailed account of the findings, backed and illustrated with evidence and examples, can be found in the main report in **wateraidindia.in/immersion-sbm**. This policy and practice

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note is intended for all those who are engaged in the SBM-G, its partners and researchers. It builds selectively on the findings and insights we gained from the immersion research together with other recent field visits. It summarises the key drivers of success observed at the ground level, and lists actions we recommend for consideration.

Key drivers of success at the village and household level

Based on the success stories and failures observed in our fieldwork, we see four key drivers of success in SBM-G, looking at it at the household level: (1) local ownership, (2) behaviour change efforts, (3) quality of toilets, and (4) inclusion.

01 Local ownership

What is required?

Households and communities believe in SBM and take ownership.

What were the realities observed?

Participation and engagement of households lead to higher uptake and sustainability, but they were inhibited by the rushed top-down implementation of SBM caused by unrealistic deadlines for districts to become ODF.

Insufficient material and/or sub-standard quality of construction led to dissatisfaction, lower usage, and lack of trust.

Distrust of messages from the Government based on experience with earlier programmes inhibited influence and change.

Lack of efforts in anganwadis (often without toilets) and schools (often with toilets, but half of them unused because of filth or disrepair) undermined households' belief in the sincerity of Government efforts.

02 Behaviour change efforts

What is required?

Behaviour change factors being addressed holistically and in a sustained way.

What were the realities observed?

The opportunity to receive an incentive or a free toilet was a key driver for toilet construction. Threats of sanctions and sanctions were widely used and reportedly effective in enforcing toilet construction and short-term use, though contentious.

Behaviour change messages (Information, Education and Communication [IEC] materials) stressed dignity, shame and respect for women, which can be counterproductive from a gender perspective. Women recalled triggering more than men, and found it more impactful. Attention to men and changing their open defecation (OD) habits was lacking, as well as menstrual hygiene management, handling of children's faeces and handwashing at critical times.

Availability of water emerged as a significant variable influencing toilet usage, especially where there was seasonal scarcity. Women usually bore the burden of bringing water and cleaning the toilet. No information was available on water saving techniques or options (e.g. rural pans).

03 Quality of toilets

What is required?

Toilet construction being of high quality and based on adequate technologies.

What were the realities observed?

Panchayat driven bulk purchase of materials and arrangement of construction (by masons and contractors) was widespread.

Twin leach-pits were promoted by the Government one-size-fits-all approach, irrespective of the local conditions. Meanwhile, preferences for big septic tanks were deeply embedded among households, who believed twin pits are too small and sub-standard.

Households had not received information regarding design options, technical details or amount of materials required.

Many toilets were of sub-standard quality, and had flawed designs, such as septic tanks that are not water-tight or excessively deep pits.

04 Inclusion

What is required?

Sincere efforts being made for inclusion of poor and marginalised households.

What were the realities observed?

Only one of the eight villages visited could be considered ODF, despite most of them having passed the ODF verification (SBM authorities in one district reported that 90% coverage was enough for being awarded ODF status). Average coverage, combining estimations from the eight villages would be 70%. Invariably, those left behind without toilets or with inadequate toilets were the poorest households or households from marginalised communities (ST, SC).

Sanctions and threats were biased towards the least powerful sections of society and had sometimes crossed the line of infringement of human rights of households. This was compounded by *Nigrani Samitis* and children committees being dominated by higher castes and those close to the Sarpanch, which reinforced discrimination against lower castes and those least able to afford or construct toilets.

Insufficient efforts were made in remote villages, with difficult terrains or where security is an issue, leading to lower coverage.

The special needs of people with disabilities or in old age were often not recognised and addressed.

Recommendations and ideas

Recommendations and ideas listed below emerge from the findings of the research, and are structured along the areas of behaviour change, technology, post-ODF, and policy, with inclusion and ownership issues integrated transversally. Where these are already policy and being acted on, we hope these findings will act as confirmation and reinforcement; and where they are new, we hope they will be considered.

Behaviour change

- Conduct a review of the current use of sanctions and threats and provide guidance to states, discouraging it as a key strategy and setting boundaries to avoid human rights violations

- Review IEC to ensure campaigns refrain from gender stereotyping in its messaging (dignity of women only), but rather try to address existing gender imbalances (cleaning of toilets, carrying water) and to motivate men to give up OD. This could be driven through innovation and action-learning processes

- Provide guidance and training to ensure *Nigrani Samitis* and similar committees include members of all castes, religions, genders and political sides

Toilet technology

- Radically transform awareness about technical issues of rural sanitation, through extensive IEC efforts aimed at the households, which could include:

  - Preparation and distribution of handbills in local languages and scripts with clear diagrams to empower households to demand and supervise quality and oversee masons and hold contractors and village leaders into account

  - Intensify promotion of twin pits wherever adequate, and promote appropriate technology options elsewhere. Address myths for instance by distributing sona khad (twin pit completely composted fertiliser) to village leaders, committees and motivators to show it is odourless and harmless

- Train and supervise SBM staff, village leaders, motivators and masons to highlight frequent shortcomings in current practices (distance between twin pits, and the need of baffles and soak pits in septic tanks) and provide clarity on what technologies are fit for each context and type of user. For instance, pit types that suit flooded areas, rocky terrain and water scarce areas, as well as accessible designs for people with disabilities. Additional resources should be made available for such situations

Post-ODF

- Consider classifying ODF-declared villages into different levels (eg Bronze, Silver and Gold) or other mechanisms to incentivise continued efforts beyond ODF declaration. These efforts could include:
  - Catering for any households and sections without toilets
  - Improving sub-standard toilets
  - Institutional toilets
  - Shared toilets with excessive users
  - Partial usage and non-usage
  - Solid and liquid waste management
- Facilitate committees and villagers to appraise, analyse and plan action for unfinished business including the above list
- Give priority to providing accessible water supplies in all seasons, research current patterns of sanitation related water use and promote water-sparing practices

- Address hygiene behaviours such as handwashing and child faeces management

Policy

- Improve monitoring and accountability mechanisms to enhance trust of Government and avoid rushed low-quality implementation, including:
  - Increase emphasis on output and process indicators, such as participation of households, capacity building of masons, quality construction, and usage rates, etc
  - Compulsory requirement of geo-tagged photographs of toilet substructure, before being covered, in the routine physical progress reporting system
  - Use information and communications technology (ICT) creatively to increase dissemination of information and enable feedback and accountability from citizens, for instance, creating a toll free number for people to call and a 'Hamara shauchalay' citizens feedback App
  - Improve ODF verification to ensure reliability, including monitoring sustained use of toilet and handwashing for a minimum period of 6 months
- Promote sanitation (with attention to operation and maintenance) in schools and anganwadis to ensure high standards, becoming role models for the areas they are in, and showcasing Government's sincerity in its efforts with SBM

- Develop inclusion diagnostics at district levels (identifying remote and other communities that may have been left out) and at gram panchayat levels (identifying poor, vulnerable and marginalised households and communities). This should be followed by action plans that ensure special attention and additional investment is made to ensure their inclusion, not only in terms of access, but also regarding their participation in planning and monitoring

- Start planning for district/block level desludging services and faecal sludge treatment plants, ahead of the time when lakhs of septic tanks fill up

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