



## Promoting cultural acceptance of sanitation practices

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### STORIES OF TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

*Inspirational examples highlighting transformations towards greater environmental and climate sustainability*



**SDG target 6.2:**  
*By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.*

#### The hygiene challenge

In 2015, about 60% of the population in India had no access to sanitation. Open defecation was a particular challenge for the country. Despite the country enjoying successful economic performance as measured by GDP, levels of open defecation remained very high. India was, therefore, unable to meet its Millennium Development Goal on sanitation and basic hygiene. Open defecation in India substantially contributes to very large numbers of children dying from diarrhoeal diseases (figures and derived estimates range from 100 000 to 1 million/year). Many of the children who survive diarrhoea have substantial negative impacts on their health, education and future productivity. In turn, this sanitation gap has a consequential impact on economic growth in the world's second most populous country, although difficult to evaluate. The lack of adequate sanitation has an estimated cost as high as USD 56 billion, in terms of annual losses across all sectors of the national economy.

In June 2015, the Government, with wide support from industry, NGOs and International Financial Institutions (IFIs),

launched the Swachh Bharat Mission – the Clean India Campaign. The aim of the programme was to stop open defecation across India.

#### The challenges of transformation

Back in 2014, 550 million people practiced open defecation in India. By 2019, 500 million people had switched to latrine use. Changing behaviours which are closely linked to basic practices for such a large number of people, and in such a short period of time, is a massive cultural and societal transformation for any society. So, how could the architects of the programme imagine that this would be possible? One part of the answer is that there has been continuous improvement to the processes used by development professionals around the world. Multi-disciplinary approaches encourage best practice and systematically review areas where obstacles occur, where parts of the population are easily neglected or negatively impacted in a given project.

Before its official launch, the campaign was able to draw lessons from gaps in previous large-scale initiatives in India. For example, the Central Rural

*“Develop a stronger ‘green deal diplomacy’ focused on convincing and supporting others to take on their share of promoting more sustainable development”*

*The European Green Deal<sup>1</sup>*



Sanitation Program launched in 1986 was considered to be largely supply led where money was provided to build latrines. Other issues, such as latrine ownership, cleaning and maintenance, septic sludge removal and treatment and behavioural change, were actually largely secondary factors. This time around, though, transforming behaviours and mindsets proved the complexity of the task in hand which was recognised.

#### **A Sanitation Coalition for behaviour change**

The Swachh Bharat Mission set out to develop a well-researched, planned and organised communication campaign for behavioural change. In order to bring all stakeholders together to work in the same direction, the India Sanitation Coalition was formed.

The coalition logo shows a squat type toilet with the four tasks in hand build, use, maintain, treat. Notice how “use” comes second.

#### **Transformational mechanisms used**

The Coalition is made up of: the sanitation market place, the people’s movement, knowledge sharing and strategic engagement of the government. It includes Government

ministries, sponsorship from Corporate India, support from industry, and the participation of many, many organisations. The objective was to bring organisations together geographically and thematically in order to create partnerships and collaboration, to share good practices as well as to actively engage with Central and State Governments.

As surveys helped reveal, one of the key issues was the need to tackle substantial demand issues. For example, people had a very expensive concept of what an acceptable latrine was, meaning that latrines were perceived as an unaffordable luxury. People also reported that they found latrines repulsive, smelly, dark places. So, most people from family members to peers, neighbours and other community members defecated in the open, making it a widely accepted practice. Toilets were viewed as a government responsibility.

However, through the coalition, advocacy, branding and communication was used to drive behaviour change so that latrines became used once they were built and thus with use, maintained. One of the key target groups were children, where latrine use and handwashing in schools helped spark change in the younger generation.



<sup>1</sup> European Commission: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on The European Green Deal, December 2019, COM(2019) 640 final, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1588580774040&uri=CELEX:52019DC0640>



## **Impact: Government declares that 500 million people switch to latrine use in 5 years**

The Swacch Bharat Mission is a remarkably high profile and visible campaign against open defecation. Led by the Prime Minister, it had adequate political, administrative, as well as financial commitments.

Since 2014, the Mission has made remarkable strides in reaching the Open Defecation Free targets. 36 states and union territories, 706 districts and over 603,175 villages have been declared open defecation free as of January 2020 (source SBM Dashboard). 500 million people have changed their behaviour with respect to toilet access and usage and have stopped defecating in the open since 2014.

Between 2014 to 2019, the UNDP National Economic Evaluation report on the mission (January 2020), announced the total cost at USD 13 billion, but estimated the cumulative savings in averted economic damage to be at USD 360 billion. This represents nearly 3% of India's GDP over that period. Furthermore, these savings will keep accumulating each year, provided the practice remains in place.

In bringing multiple stakeholders together to transform the lives of millions of people, a tremendous achievement has been made. Moreover, with the COVID 19 pandemic, this intervention, with its emphasis on handwashing, was very timely.

## **Next steps – reinforcing behavioural change and continuing the progress**

One preliminary lesson from this case is that ownership of toilets by users is an issue. Families that build their own latrine are much less likely to practice open defecation. Although official figures claim a 90% reduction of the practice, certain independent reviews give figures closer to 25%, but even such figures highlight great progress. Further efforts in freeing areas of open defecation are still needed.

Continued acceptance of such behavioural change in the long term cannot be taken for granted. Follow up studies have shown that, even if all rural households had latrines, 40% of the rural population would still choose to defecate in the open in areas of defecation prevalence. In urban areas, a further drive to tackle open defecation is also needed.

Two key factors, leadership from the Prime Minister and effective communications and partnership in the campaign (only 2% of the costs) enable replication of such successes and provide examples to other countries experiencing similar problems.

*Toilet ownership reduces open defecation.*



**500 million people**  
*switched to latrine use in 5 years*



**\$360 billion**  
*saved in economic damages avoided vs. \$13 billion invested*

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## Greening EU COOPERATION

Integrating environment & climate change

Environment and climate change mainstreaming is a legal EU requirement, essential to meeting international and internal commitments, and to supporting sustainable development worldwide. The EU is actively doing its part through the European Green Deal and will support partners to do the same.

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