

## Role of Behaviour Change Communication in Achieving A Swachh Bharat

Parameswaran Iyer



*The Swachh Bharat Mission has caught the imagination of the people, and with everyone getting involved, is for the people and by the people. In less than three years, over 30 crore rural Indians have started accessing toilets. The Mission is moving rapidly towards a achieving a Swachh and ODF Bharat by October 2, 2019, a fitting tribute to the Mahatma on his 150th birth anniversary*

For the past four decades, several rural sanitation programmes have been introduced in the country by different governments over the years. From one of India's first efforts to provide safe sanitation in rural areas with the Central Rural Sanitation Programme in 1981 to the reconstructed Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) in 1999, to the Nirmal Bharat Abhyaan, we have seldom seen the kind of mass mobilization created by the Swachh Bharat Mission in the country. The largest sanitation programme in the world, the Swachh Bharat Mission has left its construction driven counterparts behind, and moved towards a community-based mass movement.

This article looks to reflect on the journey of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) in progressing towards its goal of complete sanitation coverage. It begins with an overview of the programme, its progress and achievements and moves to the field, which is the base of the community-led participation and the recipient of highest impact as a result of the program. Further, the paper discusses different campaigns and events orchestrated to create the buzz and keep the *janandolan* going. Plunging into the importance of Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) and of customising messages with respect to the audience, the article looks at the

way forward towards a Swachh Bharat in 2019 and sustaining the same.

Making his landmark announcement on October 2, 2014 from the Red Fort, the Prime Minister called for a Swachh Bharat and successfully guided India towards an exceptional adventure. Since 2014, we have witnessed a near doubling of percentage of households with toilets, with a whopping 6 crore toilets having come up at the household level in just 3 years, going from 39 per cent in 2014 to over 76 per cent today. On the sanitation front, India has achieved in three years what we have not achieved in 67 years post independence! This has resulted in rural areas of seven States (Sikkim, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Gujarat, and Arunachal Pradesh) and two Union Territories (Chandigarh and Daman & Diu) having become Open Defecation Free (ODF).

The Swachh Bharat Mission has witnessed several notable achievements in reducing open defecation, thanks to the focus on behaviour change, need-based capacity building and constant measuring of outcomes. The programme's focus on behavior change stems from its focus on sustainability, and measuring outcomes of open defecation free communities and not just outputs of toilets constructed. The Prime Minister himself has been at the helm of affairs, being the communicator in chief of the SBM.

The author is Secretary, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Government of India. He has vast experience in the area of sanitation. He was earlier programme leader and lead water and sanitation specialist in the World Bank and has also been part of the World Bank's Water Anchor programme.



This has been a gamechanger for the Mission, and is one of the primary differentiators between the Swachh Bharat Mission and previous sanitation programs. As the Mission moves forward, it is important for individuals and communities to take ownership of their own sanitation and hygiene as well as that of their surroundings. This is only possible through a change in attitudes and inculcated behaviour traits as results of age old customs.

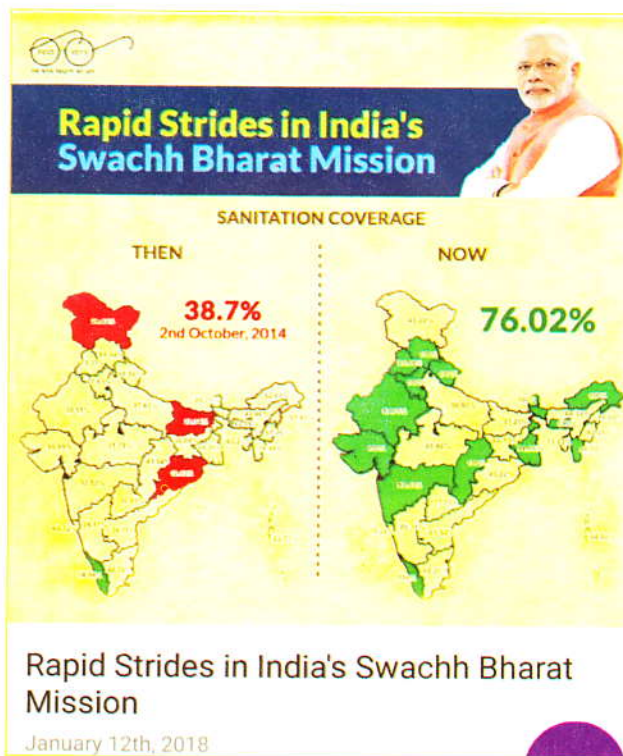
Interpersonal Communication (IPC) is a crucial component of SBM in this regard. IPC involves various activities such as door-to-door awareness generation, early morning follow ups in common OD spots in villages, etc. Emphasis is laid on conducting awareness programs, and citizen engagement in the reform process. An army of Swachhagrahis have been trained through multiple capacity building programs in all villages of the country. These are the foot soldiers of Swachhta, the ones making it happen through intensive inter-personal communication (IPC). Currently, there are approximately 3.5 lakh Swachhagrahis registered with the Management Information System (MIS) and the numbers are rising by the day.

The Swachhagrahis adopt a direct approach to trigger public sentiments during village meetings. Surveys and meetings are conducted through master trainers in all districts, in the Community Approaches to Sanitation (CAS) Programme. This is where villagers are made to realise that the toilet is critical by evoking emotions and engaging different drivers of human behaviour, such as love for one's family, care for one's children, pride in one's social status, esteem in society, etc. From evoking emotions of disgust or maternal instincts to pressing upon dignity, safety and health, villagers are encouraged to build toilets themselves, and use them continually.

Most often the 'triggering' does not directly ask villagers to construct a toilet but it is through such explorative questioning that they are made to introspect and realise for themselves, that constructing and using a toilet in their homes is the best option

for them and their families. An example of this is the Swachhagrahi asking a simple question like "how much does a person excrete at a time?" And the options are given – 200 gm to 400 gm; 400 gm to 600 gm; or more than 600 gm. As most people answer 500 gm per individual, then a family of five would excrete 2.5 kg of faecal matter at one time. Four families excreting that amount would come to 10 kg of faecal matter being left out in the open, which is carried and deposited onto everyone's food through flies. This way of participative quizzing has a hard-hitting impact on the villagers.

Swachhagrahis are of all ages, sexes and creeds. Children in particular are among the most enthusiastic sanitation champions. *Vaanarsena* (army of monkeys), a team of small kids who do whatever it takes to ensure that people do not resort to open defecation are seen in districts across the country. They engage in playful and childlike measures like blowing whistles, singing songs, taking out awareness drives to make people aware of the ill-effects of open defecation. They step out in common open defecation spots in the village early in the morning, and ask those out in the fields to build and use toilets. For the time being, they advise people to cover the faecal matter with soil, so that they do not contribute to the spread of diseases associated with open defecation. Besides, the children also visit homes of people to convey the SBM message. Since these are children from within the community itself, people don't mind their persistent messaging. This makes the *vaanarsena* one of the more powerful social mobilization mechanisms involving and led by community insiders.



The case of *vaanarsena* and other examples like it has established that identifying Champions from within the communities is a better motivator and influencer than a top-down chain of command. In this method, the community gets a sense of unity and are mobilised together to achieve their goal of an ODF village.

On the national front, campaigns and events are rolled out as a means of reinforcing the work being done in the field. Apart from spreading the message of the work being done under the Mission, campaigns are also crucial in increasing recall and keeping the buzz of the *janandolan* going. In May 2017, for the promotion of toilet usage across the country's villages, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation came out with an aggressive new campaign called Darwaza Band. Darwaza Band symbolically stands for shutting the door on open defecation. Led by eminent actor, Amitabh Bachchan, the campaign envisages bringing out a behaviour change in men who have toilets but are not using them. Actor Anushka Sharma is also part of the campaign to encourage women to stand up for this issue and assume leadership roles in their villages.





These brand ambassadors bring an incredible recognition to the Mission on a national scale by promoting social mobilisation through mass media. Swachhata has even captured the imagination of the mainstream movie industry. The mass entertainer, 'Toilet – Ek Prem Katha', starring Akshay Kumar and Bhumi Pednekar, was a seminal case of mainstreaming the Swachhata message, while also spreading awareness about ground realities and the kind of work being done by the Mission in the field. The story of a wife leaving her husband because her in-laws did not have a toilet for her to use everyday might have begun as an exceptional case or two, but since the launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission, women fighting for their right to a toilet has become a recurring theme in rural India.

In the 'Swachhata Hi Seva' fortnight in September 2017, a total of over 9 crore individuals came together in their respective communities and undertook shramdaan for Swachhata, pledged Swachhata Shapaths, wrote essays and made paintings and films on cleanliness. Inspiring such a spike in citizen engagement serves as a platform for the way forward. The fortnight witnessed massive support with celebrities holding cleanliness drives, the hockey team undertaking a clean up drive in Bangalore, and political leaders inaugurating cleanliness drives across the country. The Indian Cricket Team also joined the movement by taking up spot clean ups and recording short videos on Swachhata, which were aired during the televising of their matches. This

heightened momentum gave way to a new normal, thus, inculcating an upward curve in community participation and consequently, in the progress of SBM-G.

Sanitation in a diverse country like India encompasses a number of factors which are important determinants for the success of the mission. In order to address such factors, which makes achievement of safe sanitation a very complex exercise, the Swachh Bharat Mission gives substantial flexibility to States to devise their own action plans. These plans include but are not limited to running campaigns in regional languages, use of local folk artists as influencers or even customised toilet technology solutions for senior citizens and the differently abled.

As the number of ODF villages in the country has crossed the 300,000

The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, being the nodal Ministry of the Government of India for communicating programmes and policies of the government, put out the message of swachhata through various communication methodologies at the 15-day Swachhata Pakhwada from January 16th, 2018. During the Pakhwada, a number of communication related activities were undertaken like audio-video programmes on Doordarshan and All India Radio, publication of books and articles and organisation of swachhata campaigns.

mark, it is important to reflect on the manner in which these districts, many of whom faced several challenges along their ODF journey, achieved success. There is a lot that other districts can learn from these successes and MDWS is facilitating this learning through several learning initiatives for district and block administrators. The sanitation programme in Bikaner district for example, located in the heart of the arid Thar Desert in Rajasthan, was faced with several cultural and geographical challenges. But the BankoBikano campaign, when it was launched, surprised everyone. Unlike other target oriented government programmes, this one focused on being community led and community driven. Moreover, the basic premise of the programme was pride and self respect for the women, pride for the family, pride for the village and ultimately for the district. This thought and vision using local language and customs, caught on in the social fabric of rural Bikaner and the programme became almost self-propelling.

It is integrated and innovative approaches like these which are playing a pivotal role in putting sanitation and cleanliness on the top of everyone's mind in rural India. And behavior change communication does not stop with achievement of ODF, but continues even post ODF to ensure sustainability. Nigrani samatis in ODF villages performing regular morning follow-up is a common sight. The real success of the behavior change efforts is minimizing slip-backs in the long run.

As the Prime Minister has articulated time and again, achieving and sustaining ODF status is the collective responsibility of the entire nation; it is everyone's business. The Swachh Bharat Mission has caught the imagination of the people, and with everyone getting involved, is for the people and by the people. In less than three years, over 30 crore rural Indians have started accessing toilets. The Mission is moving rapidly towards a achieving a Swachh and ODF Bharat by October 2, 2019, a fitting tribute to the Mahatma on his 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. □

(E-mail: param.iyer@gov.in)