

The People's Policy

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The four Ps namely, Political leadership, Public financing, Partnerships and Peoples' participation provided the SBM-G its strategic focus and administrative disruption which led to efficient on-ground implementation. The Programme brought in a unique blend of young professionals and experienced but driven bureaucrats, and each person became committed to the goal.

As a grateful nation dedicated an open defecation free (ODF) country to Mahatma Gandhi this 2 October, 2019 on Babu's 150th birth anniversary, it is timely to analyse how the Swachh Bharat Mission became the global benchmark for participatory and transformative development.

Mahatma Gandhi dreamt of an India where no one had to suffer the indignity of open defecation. There cannot be a better tribute to him than the transformation of the country, in the last five years, from being on the higher side of global open defecation to a torch-bearer for global sanitation.

The Prime Minister connected with and understood the needs of our people at the grassroots and brought about the sanitation revolution we know today through his inspirational leadership. The world recognises this, and the Global Goalkeepers Award that the PM was presented with during his recent visit to the US, more than reaffirms his decision to put sanitation at the front and centre of India's developmental agenda.

Five years on, Team Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin (SBM-G) has identified four key pillars of

India's sanitation revolution, which can, more or less, be applied to any large-scale transformation in the world. In a more detailed fashion, a recent compilation of essays titled 'The Swachh Bharat Revolution' by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti, has also followed this 4Ps structure for the book, which chronicles the implementation journey of the flagship programme.

First is political leadership. Arguably, the biggest game-changer for the SBM-G was the Prime Minister investing his personal political capital in the mission. Inspired by his leadership and commitment, various Chief Ministers took up the cause, creating a domino-like effect, cascading leadership to the Chief

Secretary and in turn to Collectors, all the way down to Sarpanchs at the grassroots level. Leaders at all levels are prime catalysts for large-scale transformations.

Second is public financing. Typically, no large-scale transformation can be an unfunded mandate. Over Rs. 1 lakh crore was committed to ensuring universal access to sanitation, thereby backing the political will with budgetary support. About 90 per cent of the 10 crore households which received toilets were from socially and economically weaker sections of society and they received financial incentives to build and use toilets.

Third is partnerships. The SBM-G partnered with implementers and influencers alike — national and international development agencies, media houses, civil society, celebrities, as well as all departments/ministries of the Government of India, who pledged an additional \$6 billion for sanitation in their respective sectors. This "all hands on deck" approach, making sanitation everyone's business, helped to mainstream it into the national consciousness.

And fourth is peoples' participation. The SBM-G trained over



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half a million *swachhagrahis*, grassroots motivators, who triggered behaviour change in every village of India. Ordinary people undertook extraordinary roles and inspired others to build and use toilets. Stories of sanitation champions emerged from every nook and corner of the country. A large-scale transformation can be truly successful if it captures the imagination of the people and becomes a people's movement or a *Jan Andolan*.

While these four pillars provided the SBM-G its strategic focus, administrative disruption led to efficient on-ground implementation, which has traditionally been the Achilles heel of large programmes in India. It started with the Prime Minister setting a target, a sunset clause for the Mission — 2 October, 2019. A sunset clause brought with it a sense of urgency and accountability. The deadline drove States to prioritise SBM-G and inspired Team SBM-G to imagine possibilities that they may not have done otherwise.

The next important step was building a team of people who believed that the goal is achievable. Younger people with fresh perspective and lesser administrative baggage believe anything is possible and focus on finding creative solutions. SBM-G brought in a unique blend of young

professionals and experienced but driven bureaucrats, and each person became committed to the goal.

It was also important to think scalability during the design process. The Department attempted to devise solutions which are easy to implement, like the on-site twin-pit toilet systems for rural India, as opposed to expensive networked sanitation solutions. By providing flexibility to States and implementers by design, the mission allowed them to tailor solutions to local contexts.

To build faith in the rest of the administrative system, it



was important for the mission to demonstrate some quick wins. Low-hanging fruits were targeted first—the districts with the highest sanitation coverage—to become ODF on priority. This created a demonstration effect for others to learn from and created belief in the system. Nothing succeeds like success.

Continuous engagement with implementers made the mission agile. Team SBM-G visited each State multiple times and engaged directly with District Collectors through learning workshops, informal gatherings and WhatsApp groups, promoting healthy competition among implementers which spurred local innovation.

The SBM-G made sanitation glamorous by engaging extensively with the media, leveraging popular culture, and associating Bollywood stars, sportspersons and other influencers to promote the message of sanitation. And lastly, the mission kept the buzz alive throughout its lifecycle through regular, large-scale events with the Prime Minister at important milestones, helping sanitation stay on top of public recall.

But everything is not done and dusted. The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation recently released the forward-looking 10-year Rural Sanitation Strategy to move from ODF to ODF Plus, focusing on sustaining the SBM-G gains, ensuring that no one is left behind, and ensuring access to solid and liquid waste management for all villages. The next ambitious goal announced by the Prime Minister on August 15 this year is to ensure piped water supply to all households by 2024. With the programme in mission mode for the next five years, this will be an additional shot in the arm for SBM-G's sustainability efforts.

Evidently, India has achieved what was unimaginable a few years ago, but the show must go on. □