

India Open-Defecation Free: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract: According to Union Budget 2017, Sanitation coverage in Rural India has considerably improved to cover 60 percent of the population. Though the figure has doubled during the last 20 years still a huge population defecate in open and remain deprived of sanitation facilities. Improved sanitation facilities include piped sewer system, ventilated improved pit latrine and composting toilet to ensure separation of human excreta from human contact. For fiscal 2017-18, Government of India has allocated Rs 14000 crores under Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) for improving sanitation and cleanliness. This has increased by nearly 40 percent from 2016-17 allocation. The flagship sanitation program aims to make India open defecation free by 2019 (150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi). The construction of individual and community toilets are key to achieve this target. As per the data available from NSSO government is falling short by over 50 percent to achieve its target for the year 2016. The private sector can play an important role in complementing Government efforts in developing necessary sanitation facilities in Rural India. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be utilized as an effective tool in this regard.

The current paper reviews the progress made by the Government, both at the Centre and State level in terms of developing improved sanitation facilities. The paper also reviews the contribution made by Private sector through CSR spending and further explores the possibility of an effective Public, Private Partnership to achieve the national target of making India open-defecation free by 2019.

Key Words: Sanitation, Swachh Bharat Mission, CSR

1. INTRODUCTION:

According to some estimates nearly 65000 tonnes of faeces are dumped every day in India due to open defecation. Open defecation refers to excrete in an open environment like fields, near water bodies or on the streets but not in toilets. This has been a traditional practice in India. What started due to poverty, lack of toilet spaces, lack of awareness among people has now become a matter of habit. According to UNICEF India has the largest number of people still defecating in the open, more than 564 million. 2014 estimates suggest that around 65 per cent of people in rural areas do not have access to toilets. Open defecation increases the risk of microbial contamination of water, which causes diarrhoea among children. Not surprisingly, India reports the highest number of child deaths due to diarrhoea in the world. Open defecation also increases risk of polio infection. Among some other threats caused due to open defecation include, risk to women's dignity, diminishing productivity, lower life expectancy of those who live in such areas.

Use of toilet is thus essential for more than one reason. One of the important as stated earlier is dignity of women. Proper sanitation facilities are important for their health and safety. Use of toilet provides private space to manage their menstrual hygiene. Women and adolescent girls also face a huge risk of harassment while defecating in open during early morning and late evening.

According to the data collected from various sources less than half the population in India, do not use toilets. Instead, they go out in the open in open fields, railway tracks, garbage dumps, parks and roadside ditches. In 2015 globally 2.4 billion people had no access to improved sanitation facilities. Of these 564 million live in India.

In rural India, where 61% of the population defecate in the open. In urban India, 10% of the population practice open defecation. More than half the children living in slums in Delhi don't use toilets. (*Refer Figure 1*)

According to the World Bank, poor sanitation leads to India's economic losses amounting to 6.4% of India's GDP in 2006, which is equivalent to USD \$43 for every Indian per year.

Team Swachh Bharat supports the Government of India's Swachh Bharat Mission to improve sanitation for all by 2019. Indian Government to which UNICEF is a partner took challenge to eliminate the practice of open defecation by 2019. SBM disseminates information, generate awareness and bring behavioral changes among people.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES:

On 2nd October, 2014 the Government of India launched the Swachh Bharat Mission with a target of making India open defecation free by 2nd October, 2019. A target to cover all villages, cities and district in five years. This gave a much

needed political will to the drive of cleanliness and sanitation in particular. Recognizing the rural – urban divided in India, the government has given special focus on rural areas by launching Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin). The objective is not only to build toilets, but also to make people understand its importance and motivate them to use it. In 2014, the sanitation coverage was only 40 percent, this has increased to 61.05 percent by February, 2017. The last two years have seen a considerable progress in construction of toilets across India, but more specifically in rural areas. (Refer Table 1 and 2).

Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS), along with NSSO surveys each village, town and district across all Indian states to track the improvement in sanitation facilities. So far 4 Indian states, Himachal, Kerala, Sikkim and Uttarakhand have found to be with 100 percent sanitation facilities, with each household having sanitation facilities. While 6 other states rank in bottom with less than 50 percent of sanitation coverage.

According to date published on the website of MDWS, as of February 2017, about 1,63,4004 villages, 96 districts and 4 states has been declared open defecation free across India (<http://sbm.gov.in/>). The success so far is mainly due to two reasons, one; wide scale promotion under Swachh Bharat Mission (Abhyan) by none other than Honorable Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi and second; providing more flexibility and autonomy to state governments for planning and implementing various strategies to achieve the target. The latter is relevant because sanitation is a state subject.

3. LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES:

In spite of the progress made in terms of sanitation facilities, the fact that improved sanitation in India has much less coverage in comparison to other less advanced countries like Bangladesh, Nigeria, Mongolia and others (ADB, 2015). It is important to understand the difference between normal sanitation facilities and improved facilities. Normal facilities are public toilet & latrine, open and bucket latrines. While improved sanitation facilities refer to the hygienic separation of excreta from human contact. This is done through connection to public sewer and septic system. Also pour-flush latrine and ventilated improved pit latrine are part of improved sanitation facilities. In its report, Asian Development Bank stated that nearly 7 lakh people are involved in the collection of human excreta in India. Such a job profile makes them highly vulnerable to several health related risks and generational poverty.

In urban India, one of the major challenges is overpopulation. Due to the huge migration of poor and landless farmers from rural areas to urban areas the concentration of population without any proper housing has increased in urban areas. On the other hand, most of the urban cities in India are small in terms of area, drainage capacity, roads and other infrastructure facilities. Lack of adequate water supply has been yet another challenge. Even if households have toilets, the content of latrines, pits and sewers remain overfilled or blocked due to lack of water. For most of the time in a given year water supply remains inadequate. Together both, drainage and water supply, poses a serious limitation to waste disposable in urban areas. For municipal corporations, maintaining hygiene and environment safety has been tough. The sewage systems are poorly maintained by corporations, due to lack of resources, both money and manpower.

These infrastructure limitations still continue and thus will be a great hurdle for the corporations at local level and governments at state and center level while achieving their objective of making India open defecation free.

In rural areas the problem is more severe, as traditionally there is no culture of building toilets and latrines. People are comfortable with open defecation, without realizing the health and environmental hazards. Because everyone from their families and neighbors defecate in the open it becomes an accepted behavior. Thus the biggest challenge is to change the psychology of people and make them realize the importance of building households and community toilets. The government has already started these campaigns by enrolling celebrities like Vidya Balan and Amithabh Bachchan. If the government had promoted it as just another sarkari scheme it would have been very difficult to get the desired results. Now because it has been made look as a jan andolan (peoples' movement) by none other than the Prime Minister himself, the expectations are higher.

Some of the other limitations in achieving the target include, regular droughts, which further leads the water problem. Caste based hierarchies among those who are employed by the government for maintaining and cleaning of sewage and pits. Due to caste connect it will be difficult for the government to get skilled and professional manpower in sanitation. Lastly, gender disparity, in rural India, which is mainly male dominated, because it is convenient for males to go out and defecate in open they do not agree for constructing a latrine or toilet within the houses or at least in the village. Females, though understand the severity of the issue, but are unable to demand. Overall the challenges are more in terms of behavioral issues. Government thus will have to work hard taking along all sections of society to change the mindset of people and make them accept the need and importance of making India open defecation free.

Some of the measures which should be taken on immediate basis include

- Pro-poor sanitation program. Assistance will have to be provided to the poor households for building toilets, as this is not their foremost priority.

- Government investments in construction of community toilets should be targeted based on factual data of poverty, geographical surveys and other factors.
- Experts from the field of design and technology should be involved in creating low cost and effective toilets and sanitation systems. This will create more acceptability of the program.
- Community based approach. For creating awareness, raising funds, construction and other limitations can be overcome if the government considers the community and social groups as partners in achieving this goal.

4. ROLE OF PRIVATE SECTOR THROUGH CSR SPENDING:

It is in this backdrop of inadequate public spending on sanitation that the government should increase its efforts in motivating private companies to contribute towards development of sanitation facilities in rural and urban areas in India. The provisions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) under the New Companies Act of 2013, could be of use to government for increasing private funding in sanitation and related areas. The CSR provisions within the Act are applicable to the companies with yearly turnover of Rs. 1000 crore and more or a net worth of Rs. 500 crore and more or a net profit of Rs. 5 crore and more. Companies are required to spend at least 2% of net profit (average of the previous three years) on CSR activities.

The Act allows companies to undertake CSR activity directly on its own or through an NGO which is established by the company for this purpose only. The Company can also outsource the entire activity to any other registered NGO who has worked in similar activities at least for three years.

According to a Study by *CRISIL Foundation, 2016* – The CSR spending of top 1000 BSE companies aggregated to Rs.6800Cr.

It also found that only 50% of the companies spend 2% , while 60% spend 1.5% of their profits on various CSR items. (*Refer Table 3*).

5. BRIDGE THE GAP:

Corporate Social Responsibility can contribute towards Government resources and delivery mechanisms either to substitute them or to fill up the expenditure gaps, especially where governments are weak, corrupt and under-resourced (Visser, 2008; Blowfeld and Fyrnas, 2005; Matten and Moon, 2008).

Schedule VII of clause 135 of the New Companies Act, 2013 clearly identifies spending on the Promoting health care, including preventive health care and sanitation, contribution to the Swachh Bharat Kosh eligible for CSR funding. Swachh Bharat Kosh has been established by Central Government to attract CSR funds from Private Corporate Sector and from individuals at large including philanthropists. Donations to the Swachh Bharat Kosh , other than the sums spent for CSR under sub-section (5) of Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013 are eligible for a 100% deduction under section 80G of the Income-tax Act, 1961 (sbkosh.gov.in, 2016).

CSR spending on Health care and Sanitation (combined) stands second at Rs 1875 cr. However, there is a huge scope of increasing this amount, as at least 36% of companies surveyed in this report have used less than 1% of their profits on CSR. Also, a large number of companies are yet to spend adequately on various CSR activities. According to reports over 530 companies have violated CSR norms of non compliance and non disclosure during the financial year 2014-15. Most of these companies are based in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Odisha (indianexpress.com, 2017). (*Refer Table 4*).

The latest report by CRISIL Foundation for the financial year 2015-16 shows that though overall spending has increased by 22% since 2014-15, but only 30% of total BSE listed companies met the criteria of mandatory spending. Like previous year Education, Health and Sanitation did get the maximum share in CSR spending (indiacr.in, 2017). The philosophy of effective altruism is finally catching Indian incorporation too. CSR spending is gradually becoming a function of empirical analysis. Companies are considering the need and outcome of investment rather going by their preferences. This is a positive development and clearly reflected in the choice of CSR spending. Government should take advantage of this change and public private partnership should be further encouraged.

6. CONCLUSION:

The Swachh Bharat has become a mass movement and a very much doable mission. The dashboard of the Swachh Bharat Mission website gives a real time update on its progress. 3 States, 136 Districts and nearly 1,90,000 villages are now open defecation free. Bill Gates this year in his blog applauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi for launching Clean India Campaign. However, these achievements and applauds have their own challenges. They bring a lot of responsibility in government and its bureaucrats. The tradition of corruption and self interest first poses a serious challenge to the administration in achieving this target. Another significant challenge comes from people in general. It is important that people at all levels accept the need for improved sanitation facilities. It is now coming to notice that many villagers have used public toilets to store their crops and other resources. If such attitude continues all efforts might go into drain.

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Table – II State Wise Coverage of Sanitation Facilities as of February, 2017

Sr. No.	State	Coverage (%)	Sr. No.	State	Coverage (%)
1	Himachal Pradesh	100	17	Maharashtra	74.3
2	Kerala	100	18	Tamil Nadu	67.83
3	Sikkim	100	19	Nagaland	66.75
4	Uttarakhand	100	20	Assam	66.63
5	Gujarat	91.74	21	Karnataka	63.65
6	Meghalaya	88.82	22	A & N Islands	55.83
7	Haryana	88.67	23	Madhya Pradesh	53.49
8	West Bengal	87.91	24	Puducherry	51.88
9	Mizoram	85.46	25	Andhra Pradesh	51.29
10	Manipur	85.24	26	Jharkhand	49.97
11	Punjab	80.79	27	Uttar Pradesh	47.03
12	Arunachal Pradesh	80.74	28	Telangana	46.95
13	Tripura	78.36	29	Odisha	39.36
14	Goa	76.08	30	Jammu & Kashmir	36.22
15	Rajasthan	75.22	31	Bihar	27.15
16	Chhattisgarh	74.96	32	D & N Haveli	0

Source : <http://sbm.gov.in/>

Table – 3 State Wise Registered Companies Spending on CSR (in %)

States	2% and above	1.5% and above	Less than 1.5%	Less than 1%
West Bengal	57%	68%	32%	21%
Gujarat	56%	67%	34%	26%
Uttar Pradesh	57%	67%	32%	24%
Tamil Nadu	62%	66%	34%	34%
Haryana	62%	65%	35%	19%
Maharashtra	48%	65%	34%	27%
Telangana	51%	60%	39%	28%
Karnataka	51%	59%	41%	29%
Rajasthan	46%	58%	42%	28%
NCR-Delhi	43%	57%	43%	29%
Rest of India	38%	49%	50%	35%

Computed from CRISIL Foundation 2016

Table – 4 Sector wise CSR Spending 2015

Sector	Spending (Rs Cr)	as % of Total
Education and Skill Development	2250	33
Health Care and Sanitation	1875	27
Rural Development	892	13
Environment Conservation	623	9
Relief Funds	216	3
Social Empowerment	140	2
National Heritage Protection	120	1
Development and Promotion of Sports	89	1
Innovation and Technology	15	1
Benefits for Defence Forces/Families	15	1
Others	606	9
Total	6841	100

Computed from CRISIL Foundation 2016