

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION^{Review}

Spotlight on Sanitation
Engaging Citizens to Improve Sanitation
By Esha Chhabra

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a simple and low-operating-cost approach, the plant has so far prevented about half a million liters of fecal sludge from polluting the environment. What's more, CDD distributes the treated sludge to local farmers, who use it as an organic soil conditioner. With CDD's support, the local town council has passed resolutions to introduce comprehensive fecal sludge management processes.

The CDD team is encouraged by the results it is seeing, but with nearly 37 billion liters of untreated sewage generated by India's cities every day,⁴ the organization has its sights on the future. "Sewage management is finally a priority," says Velidandla. "Large-scale investments are being planned, and we want to ensure that all options are properly evaluated so that sustainable infrastructure is developed."

But CDD, even with its current partners, can't realize its vision alone. "We keep asking ourselves, how do we multiply our impact?" says Velidandla. "We innovate, and pilot, and test continuously because it's important to get it right—but the time to act is now. We plan to be working in five states to design and implement comprehensive solutions, and to do that we need all the partners and support we can find."

Anurag Chaturvedi co-leads Dasra's work on urban sanitation, fostering collaborations and building a community of practice among more than 60 partners.

NOTES

- 1 Census 2011 analysis by CDD.
- 2 <http://www.washinstitute.org/pdf/FSM-STUDY-REPORT-April-2015.pdf>
- 3 http://cpcb.nic.in/upload/NewItems/NewItem_210_Inventorization_of_Sewage-Treatment_Plant.pdf
- 4 [http://cpcb.nic.in/Uttarakhand_swg_18\(1\)\(b\)_2015.pdf](http://cpcb.nic.in/Uttarakhand_swg_18(1)(b)_2015.pdf)

Engaging Citizens to Improve Sanitation

THE AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK IS EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES.

By Esha Chhabra

Two years ago, India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, made a bold statement: India, he said, would eliminate open defecation by October 2019. To accomplish this enormous goal, the Indian government aspires to build 120 million toilets in rural India. The budget for the massive public project, which is referred to as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission), is INR 200,000 crores (\$29 billion).

The solution, though, is not as simple as just handing out free toilets. The people of India need to be compelled to change long-entrenched habits as well. As the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) argues, it will take a three-pronged solution—a combination of funds, raw materials, and human capital—with India's citizens fully engaged on each front, to yield a successful rollout of toilets across India.

To that end, several agencies of AKDN have been working with India's government to develop more community-driven approaches to building toilets in villages. Specifically, between 2015 and 2019 the Aga Khan Foundation, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, Aga Khan Health Services, and the Aga Khan

Agency for Habitat are facilitating access to sanitation for 100,000 families as well as improving water, sanitation, and hygiene in 538 schools. AKDN is working in the states of Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, and plans to expand to Hyderabad and Maharashtra.

Asad Umar is the senior program officer for health at the Aga Khan Foundation and responsible for this extensive project. He has seen charitable organizations dole out toilets in the past. As he says, "Clearly, building toilets works only when people use them, and usage is

A mason trained by AKDN builds a toilet for a family in Muzaffarpur district in Bihar state.

only possible when communities are involved in the planning, construction, and maintenance of toilet facilities."

FINDING THE MONEY

AKDN's approach is aligned with the implementation strategy of the Indian government; that success rests in part on compelling communities to help build their own toilets. And with that approach in mind, the government's Swachh Bharat campaign has set up a INR 12,000 (\$175) subsidy for each household to buy construction materials for a toilet. Unfortunately, those funds are released only after the toilet is constructed, a practice that Umar says can be problematic. "One of the biggest challenges the poor and the marginalized face in constructing toilets is lack of money."

To help people get the initial capital they need to construct a toilet, AKDN has established a revolving fund in Madhya Pradesh through local village institutions. Families in tribal communities can tap into the fund for an interest-free loan





to buy raw materials and pay masons. Once the toilet is complete, they pay back the loan by depositing their entire government subsidy into the fund. So far, only families who qualify for the government subsidy are eligible to participate. But even this limited effort has made a notable difference. In six months, the fund has enabled approximately 620 households in 11 villages to have toilets.

Now, given the success of the model, AKDN is encouraging more communities to find sustainable and community-based ways to finance the construction of toilets. The key, Umar explains, is to make sure the community does not fall into debt while financing the construction of toilets. “They do not want to take a loan from local moneylenders who charge high interest rates.”

HUMAN CAPITAL AND RAW MATERIALS

Even with funding, AKDN has noticed that locals needed better supplies and more help to construct toilets that meet government guidelines. While the government already runs a number of shops that sell construction materials and toilets (Rural Sanitary Markets, or RSMs), these outlets are often low on stock. “That’s because demand is low,” Umar says. “RSMs have been unsuccessful in making toilet construction easier and have not been economically viable for the local entrepreneurs managing them.”

To drum up more interest in building toilets, AKDN held a series of community meetings and street plays around one of the RSMs in the state of Bihar.

The network also facilitated wall paintings in the area that illustrate messages pertaining to sanitation. The results were positive. “We saw an increase in demand for toilet construction,” says Umar. What’s more, the RSMs are now linked to a network of masons; customers are more likely to shop there these days because they get access to masons as well as raw materials. As of this writing, in the seven locations where AKDN is promoting RSMs, more than 4,000 units have been constructed.

The third prong of AKDN’s sanitation efforts involves training more masons in order to build a larger network of skilled people who can build toilets according to government guidelines. To date, the network has trained 601 masons in four states using three-day-long courses that go over the details of installing toilets and also stress the importance of the job. “With large-scale toilet construction activities, trained masons are more in demand,” Umar notes, and now district officials in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh are asking AKDN for help in training new masons.

While it may be tempting to simply install toilets throughout India, Umar says, the answer to India’s sanitation problem rests on citizen engagement: “The proposed sanitation initiative will be successful only if communities understand the health, educational, and economic benefits of improved sanitation and adopt it themselves.”

Esha Chhabra is a freelance journalist who writes on social impact, development, and mission-driven brands. Her work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *The Guardian*, and *The Economist*.

Fostering Sustainable Sanitation

GRAMALAYA COMBINES COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION WITH EDUCATION AND MICROFINANCE.

By Pakzan Dastoor

Thirty years ago, more than 98 percent of villages in the Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu lacked household toilets. As a result, residents were compelled to defecate in the open. Diseases such as cholera and typhoid were rampant, as were instances of stunted growth and cognitive impairment in children.¹

Fast-forward to 2016, and toilet statistics have reversed. Thanks to Gramalaya, an Indian NGO that was founded in 1987, 90 percent of those villages now have access to functioning toilets in every home. In fact, a majority of the villages in which Gramalaya works have eliminated open defecation. Compare that with the rest of rural India, where three out of five people continue to defecate in the open.²

Gramalaya’s success in supporting the installation of more than 150,000 toilets in five states can be attributed to its approach, which combines community mobilization with access to financing so that families can afford to build high-quality toilets. The model gives community members ownership in the initiative, which also fosters better, and sustainable, hygiene habits. As Sue Coates from UNICEF explains, “Just building toilets is not going to

solve the problem, because open defecation is a practice acquired from the time you learn how to walk. When you grow up in an environment where everyone does it, even if you later have access to proper sanitation, you will revert back to it.”³

HOW GRAMALAYA WORKS

Gramalaya begins its work in a given area by conducting a survey, which identifies villages that have the lowest toilet coverage (the percentage of people with access to functioning toilet facilities). A team then visits those villages, meets with local leaders, and goes door-to-door to collect more detailed information about sanitation habits and behaviors. In this triggering exercise, Gramalaya members bring villagers to an open defecation site, which is then used as a backdrop to talk to the community about safe sanitation and how toilets can help.

Next, Gramalaya encourages community members to form and join Association for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (AWASH) committees. These committees will become sanitation champions and technical implementers, responsible for coordinating the order in which households will receive toilets,