

CLEANING INDIA: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

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Swachh Bharat Abhiyan: How to make it work?

Dr. Pathak: The framework of achieving the target was provided by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, who launched Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on 2nd October. The target of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is to provide Toilets for all 130,955,209 households in 6,40,867 villages, 5,924 Blocks/Talukas/Tehsils and 690 districts by 2019.

To achieve this ambitious goal, the following steps are required:

Technology: Two pit pour flush compost toilet technology, which I invented in 1968-69 and popularized in the name of 'Sulabh Shauchalaya', is a feasible solution. Sewerage and septic tank technologies are costly in construction and maintenance. Therefore, implementation of these technologies is not viable. The Sulabh technology of two pit pour flush compost toilet is eco-friendly, appropriate, affordable, indigenous and culturally acceptable. With this technology, human waste is recycled and converted into bio-fertilizers to be used in fields and gardening, and only a litre of water is required to flush.

We have so far installed 1.3 million individual toilets throughout the country and 8000 public toilets on 'pay & use' basis at public places, which are functioning very well in different regions of India. Sulabh has also constructed and maintained toilets in Kabul, Afghanistan and Bhutan.

Financing: The cost of a functional toilet is around ₹20,000/-. Financing can be done by availing of subsidy from the government, added to which would be beneficiaries' own contributions, which they can arrange by taking loans from banks or micro financing institutions.

Manpower: To achieve the goal, 50,000 motivators and 1.5 lakh masons will need to be trained to implement, maintain and follow-up the construction of toilets. Motivators will also go house to house, make people aware, educate and help the beneficiaries obtain loans from banks and subsidy from the Government.

India's key sanitation challenges...

Dr. Pathak: The most important challenge that is faced by an average Indian is lack of awareness and realization of the importance of having the facility of a household toilet. The absence of a toilet necessitates open defecation in rural areas, and in outlying and neglected urban areas. The lack of finance is a challenge faced by only the poorest of the poor and in urban areas by the slum-dwellers. It has been

noted that even where finance is available, construction of a toilet is not a priority for many, because of poor awareness. Further, an average Indian seeks expenditure in cash for construction of a toilet, but does not like to spend his own money on it. Here, the government can step in, by way of implementation of the loan-cum-subsidy scheme for construction of toilets. But, financing is not always forthcoming because of procedural delays and lack of priority. The other issues of concern are the unrealistic estimates worked out or shortage of funds with the government. Due to this, intended beneficiaries either do not find the scheme attractive enough or avail finance but fail to utilize it fruitfully. This results in construction of poor quality or incomplete toilet facilities.

Cleaning India: An imperative...

Dr. Pathak: Cleaning India is necessary because as far as toilet-related sanitation is concerned, the lack of facilities has led to the obnoxious practice of defecation in the open. Poor cleanliness also spreads diseases like diarrhoea, worm infestation etc. that in turn, adversely affect economic productivity. A cleaner India is bound to be healthy, and a healthy India will be prosperous due to the creation of a disciplined and productive work force. Moreover, expenditure over health will also be substantially reduced.

Mobilising community support...

Dr. Pathak: What is required is to boost health education on observance of elementary hygiene. Inculcating habits of cleanliness amongst children automatically puts pressure on parents to observe cleanliness at their homes. Forming School Sanitation Clubs causes peer pressure for hygiene, which is readily accepted by children. Also, it is in these clubs that elder boys sensitize the younger ones and motivate them by observing habits of cleanliness. ✂

(Excerpts from an email-interview taken by Samarth Pathak, Program Officer, Ananta Aspen Centre.)