

# SAMAGRA

- **Background**

According to WHO, as on year 2014, more than 50% of Indians (i.e. over 600 million people) have no access to toilets. Most of the public toilets and communal restrooms in Indian cities are either dysfunctional or lack proper hygiene. The condition is much worse in the semi-urban areas and in villages, where there is a near complete absence of public toilets. Worse than that, in villages, where 70% of Indian population reside, there is a severe dearth of private toilets in households. Only a handful privileged ones have access to toilets at home. Here, people are left with no choice but to defecate in open.

The practice of open defecation creates extremely unhygienic conditions that leads to disease, malnutrition and other environmental hazards. Open defecation increases the risk of microbial contamination of water (with bacteria, amoeba, viruses, etc) which causes malnutrition, stunted growth, diarrhoea and infections such as pneumonia in children. In India, diarrhoea and worm infection are the two major causes that affect children impacting their growth and learning abilities.

The most affected are the girl children and women who live under a constant fear for their safety from the sexual predators. In India, it is a common practice for the females, who lack access to private toilets, to wake up before sunrise or wait until dark to pass their urine. Moreover, they have to walk miles to find the right and safe place to defecate. Also, venturing out alone in search of a suitable place to defecate is not a safe option. In most cases women and children have to look out for some companion to accompany them in order to avoid the perils of getting in the hands of sexual predators or human traffickers.

All these environmental conditions lead to holding up urine and other body wastes inside one's body which becomes highly discomforting and pose serious health hazards. Samagra founder Swapnil faced a similar situation.

Before he became the "poop guy", Swapnil Chaturvedi was living the American dream. An engineering graduate from North-western University with a nice job in the IT sector, Chaturvedi was living quite a comfortable life in the US with his wife and daughter. But all that changed in 2007, when he visited his native place in India. On his trip, he witnessed enormous disparity in the income and lifestyle between the rich and poor. More than anything, he was appalled to see the abysmal state of basic sanitation facilities in Indian cities. During their stay in India, Chaturvedi's little daughter often used to complain about the stinking toilets at her school. He found out that, her daughter used to painfully hold her bladder during school time and would get relieved only after coming home. This proved to be the turning point for Chaturvedi, who himself, set out to clean toilets for the India's urban poor.

In 2011, Swapnil Chaturvedi founded "Samagra Sanitation", in Pune city, in order to provide the much-needed sanitation services to the urban poor. The concept has been funded by the city of Pune and the Gates Foundation and has received in-kind support from organisations like Unilever, Kimberly-Clark and UNICEF. Samagra is also supported by the Toilet Board Coalition's (TBC) first Toilet Board Accelerator program which is an alliance which supports innovative and market-led sanitary solutions. The TBC says sanitation in India is important because of the country's scale and potential.

- **Location, date etc.**

Pune; year 2016 onwards

- **Areas**

Urban Slums

- **Stage/scale**

Currently, the project operates 48 toilet blocks, serving around 50,000 people a day. It is looking forward to scaling up in other cities.

- **Objective of the assignment**

To enable the marginalized communities to lead a healthier, dignified and productive lives. Samagra's services include upgrading and retrofitting existing toilet blocks, creating a pseudo franchise model for operations and maintenance, educating end users on health, hygiene and sanitation and rewarding them for adopting healthy and hygienic behavior.

- **What was done?**

Samagra has invented a rewards scheme to create a sustainable financial model that can bring sanitation to ever more people. In the scheme, families pay a small amount for monthly unlimited access to the sanitation blocks and all their services. They earn points for using the facilities, which they can redeem for washing and sanitary products, water purification systems or nutritional snacks from local suppliers.

To augment the incentives, the project partnered with the State Bank of India to provide banking services at the blocks. People can open bank accounts, pay bills, send money and top up their mobile phones. The blocks, which also provide clean water for showers and drinking, are run as franchises by local women. They maintain the blocks in exchange for the fees paid by users.

Samagra's holistic model incorporates "change framework" into its DNA. The concept is "To change environment and user behaviour, give awesome toilet experience, engage users and then monetise user engagement".

- **Impact**

The Project is a perfect example of successful operation & maintenance (O&M) of the public sanitation facilities. It has helped in curbing open defecation in the areas it has been implemented in. It has provided dignity to the urban poor, especially girls and women. Their biggest impact in demand generation through efforts to bring users on board.

Samagra has also been instrumental in aligning the social enterprise with its integrated mission of health, hygiene and productivity. It has engaged with an NGO to offer laddoos (an Indian sweet) that are fortified with micronutrients and have been proven in a scientific study to improve height and weight in children as rewards. Samagra is putting together a franchisee model where women from the slums are trained in making these laddoos, ensures they get the raw material for the same as well as contribute to branding the laddoos.

- **Challenges, issues, Hurdles and bottlenecks**

Samagra founder Swapnil Chaturvedi went through several different sanitation projects before finding this sustainable and scalable model. His previous efforts included a small pilot constructing toilets that didn't require plumbing and had to be cleaned manually in Raipur (this project ended because it did not comply with the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Bill, 2013), and a poop-to-power project in Bhubaneswar which was wound up because it lacked financial sustainability.

The challenges in community sanitation include, firstly, ensuring clean well-ventilated secured toilets in good working condition and, secondly, to find a way to make users willing to pay for

clean toilets. Enforcing payment for community toilets in slums is difficult as the community does not have any ownership towards utilities provided to them.

- **What was unique or different about the case study - innovation?**

The most unique thing about the project is its engagement model. The toilet runs a reward scheme, as a result of which, people come back and use the toilet services. When customers visit a Samagra block, in addition to using a clean toilet, they can also top up their mobile phones, pay for TV services or their electricity bill, open a savings account, deposit or send money or take advantage of member discounts on a variety of goods and services.

The engagement model, motivating (not forcing) people to pay actively, involves and incentivizes all the stakeholders – the end users, the government, local store owners, toilet operators and SHGs/NGOs serving the community. For the municipal corporations, it provides a data visualization platform, where it can monitor toilet usage and its maintenance. Operators in this model can retain all their collections.

Samagra's loyalty program, which is mobile based, is one example of using both software and hardware to build a profitable business. The project uses information and communication technologies (ICTs), behavioral sciences and human centered designs to make public toilets accessible, affordable and aspirational for the poor. The project team is already working on eco-friendly and sustainable toilets that can convert human waste into electricity and give away bio-fertilizes as by-product. With funds coming in, the mission is to open up "Poop Franchises" which will combine Poop Rewards and the renewable waste-to-fuel toilets to build sanitation networks in Urban as well as rural India.

- **Lessons learnt**

- Community should be part of a project from the project conceptualization stage itself.
- Value added services can help sustain toilet O&M models, and in fact, make it a profitable proposition.
- Behavior change can happen only through small/incremental progress. And once behavior gets changed this way, there is no going back. The impulsive behaviour change programmes are not only ineffective, but also have unintended consequences.
- Samagra's brand of social and psychological messaging is universal and can be applied to a range of critical needs sectors that face the same dilemma of generating demand in an area of high need.
- Where the physical space is not engaging, there is no willingness to pay.

- **Financials**

Swapnil says he spent around \$200,000 of his own money before hitting on the ideas that would ensure Samagra has a chance of long-term success. The organisation is currently making a profit at about 40% of its sites and over the next six months, Chaturvedi hopes to break even before setting up in three additional cities.

- **Economic sustainability/Revenue Model**

Samagra's revenue model thus does not come from toilet usage fees, but from commissions it can potentially earn through the redeemed reward points. The next challenge therefore is to ensure that families redeem the rewards coupons they win. Samagra has gone through over five iterations of offerings – what products to offer under redemption, what frequency, when to offer and so on. Samagra is currently achieving 40% rate of redemption but with products that Chaturvedi says "are more aligned with users' needs and wants," Samagra hopes to accomplish redemption rates of over 80% in coming months. Entire user fee goes to the caretaker, as his/her income.

When households pay on time for their monthly usage (between the 1st and 5th of each month) they earn rewards points that they can redeem against purchases they make with local

vendors. The rewards points motivate people to pay on time, and highlight what they will gain and what they stand to lose by delaying payment.

- **Implementer Contact Persons**

Swapnil Chaturvedi  
Founder, Samagra

- **Sources and References, resources and materials**

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