

CHANGING BEHAVIORS - THERE IS NO QUICK FIX!

## Synthesis Document: Sanitation Promotion and Behavioural Science

Experts come up with better ways to promote sanitation in India



School toilets, West Bengal, India. Photo: Stef Smits/IRC

India is home to the largest numbers of open defecators in the world. Over the last few decades the government has implemented national programmes, which attempted to address this complex challenge. The demand for sanitation, meaning a genuine demand for toilets and actual use, hasn't been encouraging. In October 2014, the government launched the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), a national programme to eliminate open defecation by 2019. SBM has a **rural** (gramin) and an **urban** subcomponent.

### Dialogue on behaviour change communication

On 23 September 2016, experts met in New Delhi to discuss how behaviour change communication (BCC) can best help to achieve India's sanitation goals. They were invited by the India Sanitation Coalition, TARU and IRC to take part in "Insights: **WASH Dialogues on Sanitation Promotion and Behavioural Science**".

Sector experts and experts involved in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in sanitation, argued that it is crucial not just to look at how behaviour change interventions work, but also to understand what doesn't work. There is general agreement that "soft interventions" are important at the community level to ensure that toilets are not just built but also used. Despite all the investments in sanitation over the years, little has been achieved in sanitation. There seems to be a gap between the planning of behaviour change communication interventions and how they are actually implemented.

Behaviour change models can only help understand why people act the way they do and why behaviours change. However, no single template or approach has worked across countries and communities. Also, these interventions cannot be a touch and go approach, with a primary focus on getting people to build toilets. We have to acknowledge that actual change in behaviour and practice in communities takes time. Interventions have to be designed to be delivered over a longer time with relevant and progressive messaging.

This dialogue reinforced not only the significance and value of behaviour change communication but also clarified certain biases surrounding it. Here are some of the key takeaways and suggestions:

## Understand barriers to behaviour change

The lack of land tenure security, cramped and smelly toilets can affect the adoption of hygienic behaviour, said Depinder Kaur, who co-wrote

a **research study** on perceptions, barriers, and motivators for improved sanitation behaviour in rural India. Low aspirations and negative self-perception, reinforced by sanitation campaigns focusing on shame and disgust, may discourage the poor to construct toilets. In rural areas, men and women both find it inconvenient to go to their homes while they are working in the fields, thus opting for open defecation. 'Sanskritised' messaging should be avoided: colloquial or the "common man's" language should be used.

## Use positive triggers

Actions that reinforce communities' pride in their way of life and cultural habits make them more open towards behaviour change messages. Another positive trigger is exposure to properly designed, well-functioning and clean toilet facilities in health care facilities, schools, bus/train stations, etc. Toilets are more likely to be used if there is ample light, space and ventilation, easy access to water and simple pit cleaning technology. **Balaji Gopalan**, Creative Director at the Centre for Gravity explained that health is not the motivating factor for toilet demand or usage.

## Know your target group

Put communities first. Every community is different. Make sure you understand their context.

Children have a key role to play in behaviour change. Dettol's **Swachhata Ki**



Speakers at "Insights: WASH Dialogues on Sanitation Promotion and Behavioural Science"

**Paathshala** campaign campaign, which is part of their **Banega Swachh India** initiative, incorporates sanitation messaging into the school curriculum in different regional languages. The campaign's use of fun 'plug and play' technology has made it easier for children to adopt hygiene behaviour practices.

Faith-based leaders have been instrumental in influencing a vast section of the community to adopt hygienic behaviour and toilets, according to the **Global Interfaith WASH Alliance**. This is understandable when you realise that 99% of Indians belong to a faith. The Alliance plans to start a '**Swachhata Kranti**' (Clean Revolution).

Targeting only women will not solve India's sanitation problems. The focus should be all household members, including men.

### **Plan for the long term**

One-time messaging is not enough; a longer term plan for behaviour change through a sanitation intervention is required.

### **Design different messages for different behaviours**

Different messages are needed to build demand for toilets, promote proper use of toilets and hygiene, manage child faeces, manage faecal sludge, etc.

### **Take the enabling environment into account**

Behaviour change interventions alone are not sufficient. Water for sanitation, supply chains for building materials and finance, are all needed for interventions to succeed.

The Swachh Bharat Mission guidelines stress the use of Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) and Inter Personal Communication as its main strategy to increase the proper use age of toilets, hence giving cause for greater attention on this aspect in the sanitation chain. However, for BCC approaches to be effective, they need to be carefully designed and implemented with an in-depth understanding of the target communities.

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For more information on the "Insights" knowledge series visit the India Sanitation Coalition [website](#).

This document is a product of the Insights Series; developed by IRC, India Sanitation Coalition and TARU Leading Edge.

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