

Recommendations: A composite approach for the rural sanitation

"People are the real wealth of a nation. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to live long, healthy and creative lives. This may appear to be a simple truth. But it is often forgotten in the immediate concern with the accumulation of commodities and financial wealth" (Klugman, 2010, 12).

Summing Up

Poverty and uneven income characterize a vast segment of our population with poverty being the most significant issue when it comes to rural masses. Knowing the advantages of good sanitation and hygiene practices, acceleration and rapid growth in the sanitation sector is crucial to development and poverty reduction. Supportive government policies and well established institutional mechanism are required to sustain increased sanitation coverage and reap the benefits of improved sanitation. While policy reforms from time to time by the government in improving sanitation situation have started gaining ground gradually, the long term measures and efforts need to be augmented substantially to improve overall situation in sanitation particularly for equity and sustainability of achievements made.

While bad sanitation situation earns criticism from every individual citizen of the country, the community spirit is often found lacking for taking initiatives to improve upon the system and Government being blamed for not providing clean surroundings and sanitation conditions. The solution perhaps lies in taking a step forward by the community itself in a bid to

improve upon their living conditions facilitated by the government rather than waiting for the government's intervention alone indefinitely. Further one should not forget in this debate that the value of improving sanitation is most for the community itself and the efforts made are for their own gain. Properly designed strategy and honest implementation can come to the rescue of the community. For example the districts/ states (Kerala has rural sanitation coverage of 94% as per census 2011, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura etc have more than 84%) wherein sanitation situation is relatively better, also have followed the same guidelines, fund flow mechanism and incentive patterns of Government of India as available to other states. It was the community, facilitated by the field functionaries which has led them to this situation.

This study was based on the assumptions that rural sanitation outcomes vary widely based on intervention strategy and that incentives matter for achieving outcomes. As a result, the central research objective was to determine how household sanitation interventions influence toilet access and usage for the rural masses not having sanitation facilities in Total Sanitation Campaign. What are the barriers and opportunities in improving household sanitation and what can be the policy initiatives to improve upon the situation. Policy initiatives were of particular interest in the study because it was known to be one of the most critical, contested and debated elements of sanitation interventions.

To determine influence of interventions on outcomes, the study discovered how India's rural sanitation programme implementation occurs in reality. Even though Guidelines, which calls for demand-driven sanitation, in practice interventions diverged from strategy and supply-led interventions have been found to continue. Literature survey had hinted interventions might be less demand-driven than the Government

suggested. During sector experts interview, most of the experts though believed that demand driven interventions are more successful, but concurred that demand driven sanitation interventions had not been realizable in practice in the country.

The whole survey suggested and identified the clear gaps between the policy followed and preferences of the field functionaries based on their experience. It also emerged from the study that theories prevalent and the practices followed are different due to wide gaps in understanding, communication and monitoring systems followed under the programme. For instance every sector expert and the field functionary believed that door to door campaign and creating a sense of name and shame shall work best for creating effective demand for sanitation while the practices followed largely remained based on conventional mass media campaigns perhaps for the reasons of centrality of the fund utilization and concentration on centralization of whole process rather than decentralization.

Other issues of different preferences for implementation between field functionaries and sector experts also got surfaced during the survey. For example, while a majority of field functionaries and NGO representative believed that minimum cost of a sustainably usable toilet may be Rs. 8000, sector experts tend to believe that a sustainably usable toilet could cost up to Rs. 5000 in line with expectations in the TSC guidelines. The question is not who is correct, but the issue is vast level of difference of understanding and communication gap between field practitioners and subject experts and policy & field realities.

Similarly while the field functionaries believed that incentives of higher order need to be provided to motivate the beneficiaries to construct

sanitation facilities for themselves apart from awareness campaigns, Sector experts believe that a household shall construct sanitation facility for himself if made aware of the benefits of good sanitation without any financial support irrespective of his poverty level. What makes them believe this, are the concepts of Community Led Total Sanitation and its limited interventions in some of the rural areas of the country. This is also be on account of the fact that since the prevalent strategy has not delivered as expected in the past decade, there is a case to withdraw all the so called incentives and subsidies and implement the programme based only on software component of awareness creation and institution & capacity building and wait for the community to construct their sanitation facilities without imposing any targets on the field functionaries and stakeholders for improved sustained sanitation coverage.

A disconnect between field practitioners and sector experts was also clearly visible in case of opportunities in TSC that can yield better results. While better quality of construction of toilets for ensuring usage and sustained behaviour change was the first choice of the field practitioners (A voice of the beneficiaries), sector experts felt that community need to be convinced (practically forced) to come together to collectively achieve the ODF status and incentives thereafter. An idealistic thinking without giving any preferences to the local prevailing situation with respect to the divisions in the community on the lines of caste, creed, income levels and above all political affiliation.

Recommendations and Way forward

One thing which certainly emerges from the whole survey and the study is that the existing sanitation situation is grim and there is an urgent need to improve upon the sanitation status of rural areas in the country.