

Open Defecation - A Behaviour Change Communication Challenge - India on the Move

U.P. Case | Social & Behavior Change Communication for Open-Defecation Elimination (ODE)

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Synopsis of the Research Monograph

A significant number of children in India, i.e. 61 million, or 48% under the age of five, continue to suffer from moderate or severe stunting (UNICEF 2012). This can result in long-term cognitive deficits, poor school attendance and performance, fewer years of completed schooling, and lower adult productivity (UNICEF, Dillingham & Guerrant 2004) as well as increased risk of infections and higher mortality rates (Waterlow 1991, Bozzoli, Deaton & Quintana-Domeque 2009). Evidence gathered over the years suggests that open defecation is an important cause of stunting in rural India. This is because the fecal germs that children tend to ingest make them sick and prevent them from reaching their optimal growth potential. In addition, the lack of sanitation facilitates leads to the spread of diarrheal diseases - a leading cause of child deaths worldwide. As of 2012, an estimated 1 billion people still practiced open defecation (OD).

Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), the government's flagship sanitation programme, has completed three years in October 2017. However, a relatively recent rapid survey¹ conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) 2015/16 on the programme has put a big question mark on its ability to achieve the goal of an open defecation-free (ODF) India by 2019². The NSSO survey found that over half (55.4%) of the population in rural areas continue to defecate in the open. However, the situation is a shade better in the urban areas where only 8.9% people defecate in the open. As per the latest data submitted by the Ministry of Urban Development, Govt. of India to the Indian Parliament, shows that against a target of constructing 2.5 million individual household toilets by March 2016, only 1.32 million were actually built³. Moreover, the toilet use has never been an inherent and embedded cultural practice especially in the Indian rural areas. It is noteworthy that the Sanitation Quality, Use, Access and Trends (SQUAT) Survey, held in 2014 very pointedly mentioned that many people have a revealed preference for OD; as such merely providing latrine access without promoting latrine use is unlikely to significantly reduce OD⁴.

¹ NSSO 2015

² Pant, Bhaskar | London School of Economics; http://ideasforindia.in/article.aspx?article_id=1685#sthash.ybDTS5bl.dpu

³ Lok Sabha Proceedings | Parliament Secretariat Library - 2016

⁴ Sanitation Quality, Use, Access and Trends (SQUAT) Survey, 2014

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Argued by the social scientists, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) are fundamental to promoting and maintaining child health. Little does the development community realize that just one gram of human faeces can contain a billion microbes, which can, through oral-faecal transmission, cause a range of infections and diseases.⁵ A case in point - communication experts and public health researchers argued the case of polio eradication in India, wherein the communities, caregivers and even most health providers did not know the primary reason for polio virus transmission, i.e. oral-faecal transmission.⁶

Research Objectives and Methodology

The current research focused on select two districts (2 blocks from each district) in the northern State of India, Uttar Pradesh (U.P.). The districts, located in the western UP, were Ghaziabad and Muzaffarnagar - largely known for its fertile agriculture based livelihoods along with other secondary occupations in the urbanized patches of the two districts.

The study was designed to generate focused and qualitative data on the subject of Social & Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) interventions that are being employed in support of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), i.e. SBM-G.

Synoptic Findings| SBCC: Open-Defecation Elimination

Given in the WASH sector, there is an ever increasing understanding that hygiene promotion warrants more than 'business-as-usual' approaches, whereas, in practice there exists still many health-based campaigns and IEC material-based approaches. Nevertheless, there is also a growing consensus in the WASH sector that hygiene-promotion should be behaviour-centered with focused and strategic messaging and that there is a critical need of local communication-research that seeks to identify main driving forces. As is evident, many organizations through large campaigns tend to tilt towards favoring a desirable technology as the main trigger for action and thus, use social marketing approaches to make it desirable. A diagonally variant to this approach is Unilever's (*Hindustan Lever Limited in India*) work on making soap desirable. Whether it relates to hand-washing or using toilets for defecation, people-centered and individual-based strategic communication is critical for the SBCC experts in their work. While this approach may make the work of SBCC teams easier to scale (in theory), the varying local contexts cannot be overlooked.

The current study collected data to enable an overarching assessment of the available communication platforms in the select districts, while documenting the prevalent media-habits of the communities. The enquiry also helped in understanding high-risk populations - those who continue to hesitate in accessing the available toilets or perhaps, do not have access to practicing safer, secured and affordable toilet service. In addition to providing insights in to the

⁵ London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)| 2017 Course Material on Reproductive, Maternal & Child Health

⁶ Dr. Gupta, D & Agarwal, Anusha | Development Communication in Polio Eradication in India | Commit - Communication Initiative, Washington D.C. | 2014

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barriers to behavior-change in the community, the study also examined availability of and access to the on-going communication channels that are frequently accessed by the target groups.

Analysis of Outcomes | Field Enquiry

Most respondents (approx. 75%) had **access to television**, while a large number of them owned TV at the household level. However, watching TV was found limited to Hindi entertainment (films, serials and music channels), with a very small percent of respondents also tuning into Hindi news channels for short span of the time each day). Almost all the respondents recalled watching **public-service announcements** by film stars Amitabh Bachchan and Vidya Balan on open-defecation. Similarly, almost all the respondents immediately recalled hearing PM's message on open-defecation over the TV during commercial breaks and the "Mann ki Baat" programme of the PM. A few male respondents, including young people also correlated OD messages on TV with those of the billboards they recalled seeing in the district HQs or cities. Some women respondents (approx. 60%) watched TV during the day time, while all other respondents opined convenience in watching TV during late evening hours.

Radio listening was strictly restricted to private FM stations which are known for broadcasting day-long film music with some interspersed commercials, including some PSAs. Though accessing radio was found to be very poor (barely 15%) among respondents. While infrequent radio access among most male respondents was largely at the tea-shops, barber-shop and during commuting in public transport, most women respondents did not opt radio as their usual media habit. None recalled hearing primary messages on OD issues over the radio.

None of the respondents recalled any **handbills or booklets** on the issues of OD, while almost close to 70% males and barely 25% female respondents recalled seeing city and large town situated **billboards** on the issue. Some women members also recalled seeing very "text-heavy" **posters on OD** on the walls of Anganwadi (AWW) or primary school.

Many young people, close to 40%, use **SMART phones** and access internet on their mobile phone sets, yet they did not recall seeing any OD messages as such on the phones. They still mentioned seeing PM's message on SBM (Open Defecation) over the **social media**.

Access to and use of **newspapers and magazines** was extremely poor as barely approx. 15% of all the respondents admitted using these as their media-habit. Some members mentioned that on select occasions, especially on Gandhi Jayanti and other such national events, they have heard local leaders (**Panchayat members**) mentioning 'Clean India' (SBM) messages. Also, they recalled, especially women respondents, **health staff** from the near-by center emphasizing cleanliness and sanitation as a requirement for prevention of seasonal diseases. Some mothers mentioned how their children often refer to **school teachers** emphasizing use of toilets for hygiene and good health. None of the respondents actually recalled **faith-leaders** referring to OD issues as a part of their discourses or discussions.

Respondents mentioned about visits of **public-health engineering** staff in their respective localities but most respondents did not recall engineering staff sharing awareness messages on OD issues.

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Almost all the respondents complained about availability of and access to **appropriate water supply**, which could also hamper use of toilets – as opined. **Cleaning** of toilets was also flagged as one major issue restricting toilet use; this is also due to already scant supply of appropriate water.

Upon raising an issue of **comprehensive WASH communication** that would include holistic behaviour change encompassing toilet-use, hand-washing, sanitation and environmental cleanliness and appropriate waste-disposal, almost all the respondents unanimously agreed with the concept. Respondents opined that actual “clean and healthy” community would only be attained when such a comprehensive communication is ‘promoted’ in the rural areas through Government’s concerted efforts.

Identified Barriers & Gaps | Challenges for SBCC in Open-Defecation

Social and Institutional

Respondents did not find it convenient to use small toilets. They felt that these small toilets are constructed as per unfair guidelines. Continued lack of awareness regarding individual health benefits if they practiced toilet use and hygiene in tribal areas and in their language. Inadequate trained SBM staff, hence all concerted efforts in addressing open-defecation are lagging behind the National and State targets. Unavailability of appropriate water supply is another major cause discouraging people from regularly using toilets. Some community members also opined that a majority of people in the area lack awareness and guidance as regards technical aspects of toilets. Most people also felt that lack of electricity in many areas of villages makes it difficult to use toilets at night.

Individual and Households

Those who had toilets at home, some were using them as a ‘store-room’ due to lack of space in the house. Some people with addictive habits of substance abuse prefer to go out in open for defecation, as they found such time also appropriate for consumption/use of substances simultaneously. The habit of defecating in open has been passed on from generations, hence the rigid mentality and lack of adequate awareness regarding adverse impact of OD restricts many people regularly practicing toilet use. Some male counterparts did not like to use the same toilet which females were using. Most of the village elderly population didn’t wish to use toilets as they were habitual of open defecation for a very long period. The reason given was, “they feel suffocated in four walls and it gets pungent in smell”. Some community members opined that the volume and size of the pits were too small and hence, would fill up too soon. Most villagers spend their day in agriculture activities at the farm, hence they unable to practice toilet use. Many people also raised serious concerns about cleanliness and maintenance aspects of the community toilets, including lack of clarity on the toilet maintenance. On the issue of community toilets, people weren’t confident about its regular use. The primary reasons were, in addition to those given above, the distances between each household and the location of the toilet, especially during twilight hours.

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Recommendations on Strategies

The research recommends that complexity of the sanitation issue is intrinsically linked with health, socio-cultural and economic dimensions. Authors of the study have highlighted a few strategic policy and programme interventions, which would aid in yielding the desired results in building enabling environment and strengthening the SBCC interventions for the OD elimination in India.

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