

Strategy for ODF Sustainability in West Bengal

Background

Swachh Bharat Mission was launched on 2 October 2014. At that particular time West Bengal reported 60.21 percent of the households included in the Base Line Survey (BLS) as having access to toilets.

In the next two years the coverage has increased by 21.59 percentage points, thereby reporting 81.80 percent of households as in the Baseline Survey having access to toilets. In absolute terms in these 24 months 32.77 lakh individual toilets have been constructed. In addition to these individual toilets, all schools have been provided access to toilets, separately for boys and girls. Vigorous attempts have also been made to provide access to toilets to the children in Anganwadi Centres. Toilets have also been built in places of public congregation in the form of Community Sanitary Complexes.

Number of toilets constructed is only an indicative figure to demonstrate the scale of the programme. However, actual achievement in Swachh Bharat Mission (Mission Nirmal Bangla in the State) has to be measured in terms of the communities achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) status. In that particular respect, these 24 months of intense activities have resulted in 14005 villages achieving ODF status. Nadia of West Bengal was the first district of the country to achieve ODF status, after launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) [SBM(G)]. The district was declared ODF on 30th April 2015 after rigorous verification process undertaken by the district involving multiple stakeholders and external agencies. Thereafter, three more districts, namely Hooghly, North 24 Parganas and Purba Medinipur have achieved ODF status. Districts like Bardhaman, Coochbehar and South 24 Parganas are very close to achieving ODF. Intensive activities are continuing in all these districts and on regular basis the villages and GPs are declaring themselves ODF. In this perspective, it has been considered appropriate to have an ODF Sustainability Strategy and ODF Sustainability Plan for the State.

Concept of ODF:

What does ODF actually mean? ODF is a state of cleanliness, where all people have access to toilets at home, in the institutions, at work and on transit; where no one is going to defecate in the open. Whereas ownership of a toilet at home is a big jump, it is

not absolutely necessary for all households to have toilets. Shared toilets, institutional toilets, public toilets or sanitary complexes –all have their contribution towards ODF. The most important indicators for ODF status of a village are absence of any visible sign of open defecation and in practice no one going into the open for defecation.

ODF Sustainability

Any talk of ODF sustainability starts with the presumption that ODF status for that particular area has already been achieved. Naturally the focus of the ODF sustainability strategy is on ensuring that everybody in the community is continuing to use the toilets; even the elderly and differently able people are making use of the facilities and the feces of children are disposed of through the toilets pans. This requires vigorous monitoring of the usage status, continuous working with the triggers for sanitation and safe hygiene practices and also keeping a sharp eye on the quality of the toilets constructed - smooth flow of human excreta into the pit without contaminating the adjoining pit as well as nearby water sources.

ODF Plus

Achievement of ODF cannot be the be all and end all of sanitation movement. In order to sustain the momentum generated in its journey towards achieving ODF status, the villages also need ideas and activities towards ODF Plus. In the post-ODF phase mere talking of adhering to the practice of close-quarter defecation may not be sufficient to sustain interest of the community. The village as a community has to understand that achieving ODF has its benefits, both direct and indirect like reduction in morbidity, improvement in health status, reduction in malnutrition etc. Indirect health benefits of ODF may be difficult to measure in the short term. There are direct benefits like community incentive and several other activities like Solid & Liquid Waste Management (SLWM), provision of water in the form of ODF Plus etc. These special facilities have to reach the ODF villages to ensure credibility of the system.

Barriers to ODF sustainability

During the NBA regime more than one thousand Gram Panchayats were declared as 'Nirmal Gram'. Whatever be the duration of the success, it is a fact that most of the GPs declared 'Nirmal' could achieve ODF status at a given point of time. Unfortunately, the

status could not be sustained for long and there were slip backs all across. This is a phenomenon, which is not limited to our state only. The implementers of sanitation programme have experienced the same predicament all across the globe. Naturally, any strategy for ODF sustainability should keep a sharp eye on the reasons for slip back and monitor the bottlenecks so as to ensure that the ODF status is sustained. There are several barriers to ODF sustainability. However, a broad categorization may include the following:

- Poor quality of construction in terms of technology
- Poor quality of construction in terms of durability
- Lack of access to water sources
- The toilets having been inaccessible to certain category of members, (old, children and infant etc.)
- Continued lack of awareness of the negative impact of not using toilets
- Operation and Maintenance (O&M)

The ODF sustainability strategy looks into all the aspects, both individually and collectively. Once the community has stopped going to the open for defecation an assessment would be required to identify the toilets built with imperfect technology. If a single pit toilet is found, it has to be converted into twin pit. If there are interconnected pits, the problem has to be addressed, if necessary by constructing a third pit. If a toilet appears smelly, the water seal has to be checked and, if necessary, replaced. If vent pipes are attached to toilet units, those are to be removed. So far as the durability of the superstructure is concerned, it might be difficult to make any intervention at this stage. However, the households are to be motivated to go for a more durable superstructure at their convenient time by using their own resources.

Wherever a household has members belonging to some special category, the household has to be motivated to go for some changes in design, may be at a later date, to make it accessible to such differently able persons. For infants, it has to be motivational inputs to the mothers and other family members to appropriately collect their excreta and to dispose through toilet pan with proper flushing. There may also be an attempt to provide some kind of a toilet training to the toddlers so as to ensure smooth graduation of children into use of the facilities. The issue of water availability is something, which might need investment-intensive intervention. However, till such time

water is made available within reasonable distance, the communication focus should be on taking water to the toilets, even if after fetching from a relatively distant point. The message should be clear to the effect that if drinking water could be fetched, so be the water required for ablution.

Motivators for achieving and sustaining ODF

Principally the motivators for sustaining ODF are the same as the motivators for achieving. Not just individuals and households, but the community has to understand that in an ODF environment the morbidity decreases, nourishment improves, health status of the members of the community improves and even some of the preventable deaths can be avoided. For these the strategy will be one of continuous interaction with the villagers through interpersonal communication, extensive IEC and use of frontline workers of associated government departments. The children, especially the students in schools, will have to be kept engaged with promotion of sanitation and hygiene behavior. This has to begin both in the family and in the institutions where children study. Monitoring the use of toilets in Schools, Anganwari Centers and hand wash practices after defecation and before taking mid day meal (MDM) has to continue by using both the teachers and their peers.

ODF plus for ODF sustainability

As has already been indicated, the ODF Strategy must have an inbuilt component of ODF plus. In course of the journey towards ODF we have reserved some program fund at the rate of Rs. 2000 per toilet constructed for the households included in the BLS. It was our intention to provide access to this particular resource to the community so that they can build some of the community assets. The assets, however, should be relevant to water and sanitation. Priorities might be given to bringing water closer to the people and/ or providing better facilities for management of waste, both solid and liquid.

Providing access to water

Within the given limitation of resources for providing access to water, the districts may enter into a discussion with the officers of Public Health Engineering Department to map the existing water supply facilities in the ODF villages, identify the deficiencies, identify the nearest source of water supply, considering whether water from those nearby

facilities can be extended to the ODF villages and finally assess financial requirement for such extension of facilities. There may be stand posts, closer to households or thereeven may be provision of household connection. In case of stand post, funding may be through a combination of the money reserved for community incentive and other funding resources. In case of household connections, the households too may be asked to contribute towards extension of services. In villages, where no pipe water supply scheme is in operation in the vicinity, the problem of water may also be tackled through boring of hand pumps in different clusters. Whatever is the possibility, the demand and the options may come from the villagers themselves through a process of participatory discussion in the villages.

Solid Waste Management

Another very important component of Mission Nirmal Bnagla is management of solid waste. However, keeping in mind the population size of Gram Panchayats in West Bengal, it is hardly possible to collect and process the solid waste of an entire Gram Panchayat by utilizing the approved amount of Rs 20 lakh only. All our efforts to develop centralized facilities in certain Gram Panchayats have failed to address the waste disposal requirement of all the constituent villages. One centralized processing unit may at best, cater to 1500 to 2000 households in the given limitation of funding. It is in this perspective the state encourages the districts to go for convergence with Mahatma Gandhi NREGA, and others programs like the National Rural Livelihood Mission. Here also some of the funding gaps may be plugged by utilizing the money available as community incentive. Even after doing all these there still might be households in the periphery, which might not be accessed by the central processing units. Here again, as part of ODF plus activities, the district, block, Gram Panchayat authorities may consider using the provision for establishment of composting units at the household level out of MGNREGA. Vermicomposting infrastructure for some systematically identified households may bridge the gap in waste management for the households in the periphery. For this a specific year-wise plan may be developed covering all the ODF GPs in a phased manner. For 2017-18, every ODF Block will have at least one SLWM facility with corresponding decentralized waste management through source level composting. For 2018-19, the target may be to cover all the GPs achieving ODF till March 2017 and all other ODF GPs may be covered thereafter.

Liquid Waste Management

Promotion of cleanliness in the post-ODF stage also requires intervention in Liquid Waste Management. All the tubewells, especially the community tubewells, should have a platform linked to a concrete drain, which terminates into a soak pit. It is possible to take this particular activity out of resources under MGNREGA. However, as a part of ODF sustainability strategy, appropriate IEC and Inter Personal Communication(IPC) with the community and advocacy with the implementing agencies of MGNREGA should be undertaken. The other larger issues in liquid waste management like disposal of the drainage water of the villages may also feature in the public discourse and suitably addressed by utilizing fund from different sources. To start with, a target may be set to cover all Government/ Panchayat water sources with platform, drain and soak pit by March 2018. However, work may start right across and substantial development may be targeted within March 2017 itself.

Penal measures for violation of ODF norms

Achieving ODF status for a village/ GP is the result of rigorous pursuit by the community and functionaries. The commitment of the community in achieving ODF cannot be allowed to go astray due to irresponsible behavior of some individuals resorting to open defecation despite having access. Social sanction may be one way of countering such deviant behavior. However, at the post-ODF stage, the Gram Panchayat must put in place a system of legal sanction against the deviant people. Specific penalty in the form of fine should be imposed on any person caught defecating in the open. Suitable modification in the Byelaws of the Gram Panchayats should be made to include this specific provision of fine. Also, provision in the Byelaws can be made to make it mandatory to have the plan of toilets included in the building plans for the purpose of getting building plan sanctioned by the Gram Panchayat.

Campaign on different social issues

Triggering and other community processes in the efforts to achieve ODF status has been able to unleash the spirit of community action for a social cause. The spirit may further be nurtured through action-oriented interventions against various social evils like dowry, intoxication, child labour, acridities against women etc. The more the community

works together to address social issues, the more it is likely not to lose sight of the primary trigger for community engagement, i.e. the issue of ODF community.

Campaign for social causes is only one part of the initiatives in the ODF communities. Sanitation is certainly a way of life. Sanitation has its specific impact on the health status of individuals in the community. It is a public health issue. Naturally, the districts may think of integrating different public health campaigns with ODF Plus. The campaign for routine immunization strengthening, institutional delivery etc. may be built into the ODF Plus for systematic follow up.

Menstrual hygiene management

While management of menstrual hygiene is a health issue closely monitored by the Health & Family Welfare Department, in the post-ODF stage, we may initiate a special campaign to improve awareness on this issue in the community. Menstruation is often considered a taboo and apart from the women directly affected by it, awareness should spread in the community as a whole including the male members. The Department is in the process of developing a set of IEC materials, a Communication strategy and some materials for capacity building including training modules on this. This may be extensively used to improve awareness on menstrual hygiene.

Proposed activities in ODF villages for sustainability

As already indicated, the activities proposed are of two types, each reinforcing the other.

- A) Continued vigilance over ODF status and
- B) Activities to promote graduation of the community in ODF plus stage.

In the first part we would require an institutional mechanism to continue monitoring of ODF status and reasoning with the deserters.

The mechanism at Village level

In the villages, during the march towards ODF, Para Nazardari Committees/Nigrani Samities were extensively used for providing motivation and monitoring. In the post-ODF stage, we may not require daily monitoring as such. However, the members of

such committees may be encourage to make periodic visits to probable OD sights and dissuade the deserters, if any.

The village level Health, Sanitation & Nutrition Committee (VHSNC) or the Village level Water & Sanitation Committee (VWSC) may also be entrusted with monitoring of ODF status on a periodic basis. Incidentally, the institutions of VHSNC and VWSC are governed by Government orders and have specified structures. These Committees have organic linkage with the Gram Panchayats with the Pradhan (for VWSC) and the members (for VHSNC) playing leadership roles. The institution of the 4th Saturday meeting at the Gram Panchayats is also important point of interaction with the VHSNC/ VWSC. These institutions may be effectively utilized for monitoring of post-ODF activities. In the 4th Saturday meetings of the Gram Panchyats one of the agendas may be discussion on ODF status and post-ODF activities. The institution of SwachhtaDoots may also be utilized against specific activity-based incentives to be determined by the district, after obtaining specific approval from the State. The incentive money should be coming from within the IEC budget of the district.

There may also be public discourse in the villages on ODF and post-ODF activities at least once in a month.

In order to ensure continued engagement with the community, celebration of different days associated with sanitation and cleanliness may also be planned. The practice of ODF celebration, ODF centric competitions, sports and cultural events may also continue on a regular basis. In course of such celebration/ motivational programs, folk media and other traditional local media may also be used in a systematic manner.

Promotion of other activities like hand washing with soap, management of menstrualhygiene, disposal of solid and liquid waste, segregation of solid waste into biodegradable and non biodegradable, the technology of converting biodegradable waste into compost may continue to be discussed in the public forum.

Institutional level mechanism

At the institutional level, the Anganwari Centers and the schools may be used as the hub of awareness on water and sanitation, especially in the context of an ODF community. The practice of discussion on sanitation including hand washing in the

prayer lines, taking ODF pledge to continue ODF status, using other cleanliness measures and using the students as harbingers of sanitation message in the community may continue. In every school a committee may be constituted to monitor sanitation status in school as well as keeping vigil on the sanitation scenario in the community.

All institutions meant for service delivery where people come in large number should ensure appropriate cleanliness in the premises and providing adequate facilities for sanitation to the visitors. A block level team may conduct periodic surprise checks to the institutions to ascertain adherence to the standards of sanitation.

Mechanism at the Gram Panchayat level

At the Gram Panchayat level, the focus will be on continued engagement with the issue of sanitation, periodic visit to the community to ascertain whether ODF status is maintained or not, increasing use of the frontline workers of different departments and using the forum of 4th Saturday meeting in the Gram Panchayat to promote sanitation.

Mechanism at the Block level

At the block level, even after reaching the ODF status, the thrust on sanitation may continue under the leadership of the Block Development Officer. Services of the Block Nodal Officer for sanitation may also be used on ongoing basis. Major tasks at the block level may be the following:

- Periodic field visit to ascertain sustainability of ODF status
- Co-ordination meeting with different stakeholders on a monthly basis to promote sanitation and ODF plus activities
- Surprise visit to the institutions to check adherence to sanitation standard
- Occasional celebration of different days through events linking with ODF and ODF plus

Mechanism at the District level

The district level will lead and co-ordinate all the activities indicated above. Moreover, the districts may also think of different innovative activities to keep sanitation in focus and integrate it with different other development activities.

Mechanism at the State level

At the State level the thrust will be on continued engagement with the ODF districts, blocks, and Gram Panchayats alongside monitoring of activities in the areas yet to turn into ODF. In ODF sustainability part focus at state level will be on the following:

- Periodic verification of ODF status through field level units
- Promotion on activities for Solid & Liquid Waste Management
- Promotion of activities to reduce, reuse and recycle polythene products
- Coordinating with other departments and programs as well as international organizations and other civil society organizations to promote activities in ODF plus.

Periodic assessment of ODF status

A mechanism will be evolved for periodic assessment of ODF status in the community. There might be instances where despite having been declared ODF some of the households might not still have access to toilets, there might be some households which were earlier tagged with some facilities beyond their direct control and meanwhile have lost access to such toilets, there might be certain instances of existing toilets developing certain smells including demolishing of the structure there might also be certain specific cases where despite of having access, some of the members are not using the facilities and going to the open for defecation. Continuing vigil by the VHSNC/ VWSC as well as continuing engagement with the Nigrani Committee/ Para Nazardari Committee may help the authority identify such aberrations. Wherever deviations are noticed there should be immediate intervention to address the issue. Households genuinely left out may be subsequently provided support in the form of incentives for building the toilets. Households not being able to use the facilities may be encouraged to upgrade and the deviant individuals may be brought under some provision of penalty for going into the open. While monitoring will be a continuous process, there may be comprehensive survey in the villages to identify the aberrations on a quarterly basis.

Village Cleanliness Index and Solid & Liquid Management Index

The Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation, Government of India circulated a set of guidelines on ranking the villages in terms of cleanliness through participatory construction of Village Cleanliness Index. The indices are supposed to be developed by the community under leadership of respective Panchayat member by taking into consideration the following aspects:

- Households having access to safe toilets and using the toilets
- Household having no litter around the premises
- Households having no waste water stagnating around their compound
- Public places having no litters strewn around.

On assessment of the percentage-wise calculation of each of the categories, the Village Cleanliness Index and the Village SLWM Index will be developed and put up in a meeting of the Gram Sabha having at least one PRI member and 20 other residents of the village. It will be the responsibility of the Gram Panchayat to collect data on cleanliness, organize Gram Sabha meetings for preparation of the indices and with approval of the Gram Sansad finalize the indices for updating into the GOI server. This, however, is not to be a one-time activity and based on further developments, the index would be updated from time to time.

Funding requirement

One of the major constraints in taking up activities in the ODF plus or ODF sustainability phase is the present system of linking IEC budget to the programme budget. Naturally when a particular unit achieves ODF status, there is little programme fund left resulting in consequent reduction in availability of IEC fund. While the present system restricts IEC budget in the ODF plus phase, it is all the more important to continue sustained activity in the post ODF phase. Naturally depending on approval of the Government of India, we proposed to allocate an additional amount at the rate of (@) Rs 100 per household per year for the ODF Gram Panchayats. This, along with utilization of other funding avenues may help the field level implementers to continue activities in promotion of sanitation in the ODF communities.

Summing Up

ODF Sustainability Strategy has a two-pronged approach. One is continued interaction with the community through various institutional mechanism (VHSNC/ VWSC/ PNC/ Ningrani Samity) and frontline workers (AWW/ ANM/ Teachers etc.). In continued interaction, focus will be on monitoring toilet usage by all and at all the places as well as identification and rectification of defects in design, left out households, if any and remedial measures. Specific penal measures for people caught performing open defecation should be incorporated in the Bye-laws of the Gram Panchayats and enforced. Messages on safe drinking water, hand washing with soap, maintaining overall cleanliness in the villages including cleanliness in relation to solid and liquid waste should be disseminated on an ongoing basis. In the ODF Plus category, specific activities for using the money reserved as community incentives, solid and liquid waste management, development and updating of the Village Cleanliness Index and Village SLWM Index as well as converging other development interventions in the ODF Gram Panchayats may be planned and kept at the center of interventions.