

Not Rhetoric

What Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan Really Needs

MANJUR ALI

A lot of hype has been created around the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan. But funding from sources such as the corporate social responsibility coffer is wholly inadequate. Moreover, reliance on public–private partnerships without strengthening the capabilities of the existing public agencies in the field through adequate budget allocations and proper training of personnel is a sure sign that the ambitious 2019 target for drinking water supply and sanitation is not going to be met.

On 1 January 2015, an English-language daily reported that the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (SBA) was liked by 56% of the respondents of a survey conducted in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune and Ahmedabad.¹ The union government had launched SBA on 2 October 2014 with two submissions, SBA (*gramin*) and SBA (*urban*). Budgetary provisions for the two submissions will be provided separately in the Demand for Grants of the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) (for *gramin*) and the Ministry of Urban Development (for *urban*). Two other ministries, the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), more specifically, the latter's Department of School Education and Literacy, will be responsible for the construction of *anganwadi* and school toilets.

Prior to the onset of SBA, the first major intervention by the union government was the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) in 1972–73, to support states and union territories with financial and technical assistance to implement drinking water supply schemes in “problem villages.” In 1986, a technology mission with stress on water quality, appropriate technology intervention, human resource development support and other related activities was introduced. This was renamed as the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission (RGNDWM) in 1991. In 1999–2000, sector reform projects were evolved to involve the community in planning, implementation and management of drinking water-related schemes. In 2002, this was scaled up as the Swajaldhara programme. From 2009 onwards, it was rechristened as the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP). The NRDWP and the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyaan

(NBA) have been the union government's flagship programmes for rural drinking water and sanitation.

However, the SBA draft, circulated on 22 August 2014, combines the drinking water supply and sanitation programmes and wishes to achieve safe-water supply and open defecation-free status in both urban and rural India by 2019, the year that will mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The government had circulated this draft to solicit the opinions of different actors. Since the announcement of the scheme many opinions, mostly eulogies, have been expressed. However, there are also some who look at the programme critically. For instance, Anand Teltumbde has argued that “The biggest flaw of Modi's mission so far is that he has totally missed the point if he really meant business. He must understand that India cannot be swachh without the caste ethos being completely eradicated” (Teltumbde 2014). Prabhat Patnaik explains that “The State, in short, is now planning to abdicate its responsibility for providing sanitation infrastructure to its citizens and is leaving the task to the corporate sector” (Patnaik 2014).

The theoretical debate on state, democracy and citizens' right vis-à-vis this mission is too broad to discuss over here. This article highlights the weaknesses of the mission as reflected in the draft. Second, finance being the important factor for the success of this mission, this article looks at the requirement, the source of funding and its implications. Third, the article raises certain demands before the nodal ministries to strengthen the SBA.

Critical Analysis

The draft acknowledges the need for better drinking water and sanitation facilities in both rural and urban India, especially for women and children. Para 3.4 notes:

While having a toilet is important for everyone, access to safe, clean toilets brings particular benefits to women and girls. Freed from the need to defecate in the open, they no longer have to suffer the indignity, humiliation and often verbal and physical abuse when relieving themselves. Sexual harassment and rape are a risk for many women who without a household toilet have to wait until nightfall to seek the privacy of darkness outside to relieve

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Manjur Ali (manzoorali.ali@gmail.com) is a researcher at the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability, New Delhi.

themselves. Women and girls don't need toilet facilities just for defecation; they also need privacy and dignity when menstruating. The symptoms of menstruation, pregnancy and the postnatal periods become more traumatic if women have no space to deal with them. The need for sanitation facilities within homes and in public places, which meet women's physical and psychological demands, cannot be over-emphasized (GoI 2014).

The draft also makes an assessment based on a baseline survey by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (2012–13). It has set a target of 11.11 crore individual household latrines (IHHL), 0.56 lakh school toilets, 1.07 lakh anganwadi toilets and 1.14 lakh community sanitary complexes (CSC) by 2019. Further, in para 7 the draft deals with key challenges and the way forward to make the mission successful. Behavioural change influencing 590 million population in rural areas, the problem of convergence between the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and NBA, lack of water availability in toilets, defunct toilets, inadequacy of staff at the ground level, these are the key challenges noted by the draft. The last part of draft proposes a Plan of Action (PoA). This article focuses on this PoA.

A recent study by Coffey et al (2014) found that “many survey respondents’ behaviour reveals a preference for open defecation: over 40% of households with a working latrine have at least one member who defecates in the open.” Open defecation is a socially accepted traditional behaviour in India, especially in rural areas. It has been a tough job to convince a section of the population to regularly use constructed toilets. But, countries like Bangladesh and Indonesia have shown remarkable change in behaviour towards sanitation after comprehensive information, education and communication (IEC) was imparted. The current draft also makes a case for behavioural change, notwithstanding the fact that the budgetary allocation has been tilted in favour of toilet structure. Earlier, the IEC allocation in the budget was 15% of the total allocation, which has now come down to 8% (Press Information Bureau 2014).

The draft has put forth the need to explore the convergence between NRDWP and NBA under SBA. But it notes the

earlier problem of convergence between the MGNREGS and NBA which were under the Ministry of Rural Development and MDWS, respectively. So, what is the purpose of this convergence? The current draft is planning to deal with the shortage of staff by convergence of the two programmes. It is argued that convergence will strengthen the administrative infrastructure at the state level and avoid unnecessary duplication and confusion. However, the previous Parliamentary Standing Committee for MDWS had clearly mentioned the fact of inadequacy of staff in the department. At the district level, the existing staff is overburdened with a number of roles. Hence, the situation demands more recruitment on a permanent basis instead of offering contractual jobs. This would help in attracting quality and dedicated staff. Otherwise, merger of the two programmes, NRDWP and NBA, would reinforce the problem of overburdening the staff and would have adverse implications in the implementation of the programme.

Another pertinent issue related to success of SBA is the question of grants to the states. The draft proposes to release funds as reimbursement and not as “entitlement.” Para 11.1(c) argues that “It would be better to release not as per the present formula giving entitlement of States, but on a projected basis, on the basis of the Detailed Project Report of a district as a whole both for water and sanitation.” This will be self-defeating as States would not be able to meet the required annual amount for the water and sanitation projects. The campaign has a huge financial implication for the government.² Further, this would delay the projects.

Financial Issues

According to a 2014 article by Coffey et al (2014), to construct 12.3 crore toilets, it would require one-sixth of the total expenditure of the Union Budget 2012–13. The report is apprehensive of derailment of the sanitation scheme in India due to shortage of funds and of Indians missing the “middle sanitation ladder.”³ Citing some international experiences where people opt to construct low-cost toilets, the article claims that use of a toilet has less to do with poverty. The article further

argues that use of a latrine or owning one in rural India is considered a luxury rather than a necessity. According to the government's own estimate, SBA needs a total of Rs 1,96,000 crore over a period of five years (Rs 1,34,000 crore for rural and Rs 62,000 crore for urban). The annual budgetary requirement would be approximately Rs 39,200 crore, if distributed evenly. The amount required is more than double of what was allocated in 2014–15 (budget estimate, BE). For instance, Rs 15,260 crore was allocated for NRDWP and NBA during 2014–15 (BE).

The ministry has proposed to increase the financial assistance for IHHL, toilets in schools, anganwadis, and rural sanitary mart and community sanitary complexes (CSC). SBA (gramin) has proposed to raise the unit cost of rural toilet construction in India. For IHHL the amount will be raised from Rs 10,000 to Rs 12,000.⁴ For school toilets the proposal was to raise unit cost to Rs 54,000 instead of Rs 35,000. Similarly, for anganwadi toilets, the proposed amount was Rs 20,000 instead of Rs 8,000; for CSC the amount proposed is Rs 6 lakh from the existing Rs 2 lakh. The announcement came after the NBA review meeting held on 25 August 2014 at New Delhi. It is a welcome step by the MDWS. However, it is important to analyse the draft note on SBA as its suggestions have major financial implications for the union and state governments.

At the moment, government is relying on the corporate social responsibility (CSR) and individual donations for funds. The fund under CSR would be channelled through *Swachh Bharat Kosh* (SBK) headed by secretary, Department of Expenditure. Funds from SBK will be used to construct community, individual, school, and AWC toilets in both rural and urban areas, and reconstruct dysfunctional toilets. Funds under SBK shall be used for the provision of water supply to constructed toilets. These actions should be proposed by the line ministries, both at the centre and the states. Also, donor ideas of asset creation may be considered by the governing council, if the suggestions are in conformity with the guidelines. Corporates can assist in covering the gram panchayats for sanitation, especially CSC, either directly or

through CSR. They may also look after operation and maintenance (O&M) for a couple of years. Public-private partnerships (PPP) would be considered for community toilets and community water treatment plants.

So far, only 1,450 listed companies would fall under the Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility Policy) Rules, 2014. Out of those, only 1,250 companies have shown profits exceeding Rs 50 million till 31 December 2013. The expected CSR collection at the rate of 2% would be Rs 9,670 crore (Khandkar 2014). The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) II government, in its last phase, was expecting a total collection of Rs 15,000 crore to Rs 20,000 crore under CSR. Even if one takes the government's expected figure, it is minuscule when compared to the requirement of SBA. Not only that, the entry of private participation in rural water supply may raise the input cost of water supply in rural areas. The Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability's (CBGA) earlier study on fund utilisation of NRDWP and NBA in Sehore, Madhya Pradesh, revealed that PPPs would negatively affect the poorer section of the society, those who are not able to pay the recurring cost in water and sanitation. Also, prior experience like the *Namma Toilet Project* in Tamil Nadu suggests a caveat for overdependence on private firms. The project was unable to achieve its original objectives due to a "poor response from private firms and the Chennai Corporation lowered the number of toilets to be built from 2,000 to 750..." (Jonnalagadda and Tanniru 2014).

In urban India, the draft proposes to construct 1.04 crore household toilets, provide 2.5 lakh community toilets, 2.6 lakh public toilets, and a solid waste management facility in 4,041 towns under SBA (urban) (Ministry of Urban Development 2014). Government, through Ministry of Urban Development, is planning to spend about Rs 62,009 crore. Of the total amount likely to be spent on the programme, the centre will pitch in Rs 14,623 crore and Rs 4,874 crore shall be contributed by the states as the state/urban local body (ULB) share. The unit cost of IHHL in urban areas is Rs 5,333 per toilet. In urban areas, the proposed Union

share is Rs 4,000 and Rs 1,333 is the share of the states. The differential unit cost between rural and urban areas is not explained in the proposed draft. The total gap of funds in SBA (urban) would be tantamount to Rs 42,512 crore. The situation explains the crunch of fund. This notwithstanding, the scope of Nirmal Gram Puraskar has been widened to include activity at the block and district levels. The SBA introduces awards for panchayati raj institutions (gram panchayats, block panchayats and district panchayats), individuals, officers, non-governmental organisations (NGO) and also for best practices. This would mean an increase in the required funds for the programme.

Recommendations

Increase Unit Cost of IHHL under SBA:

Although the unit cost estimate for a rural toilet has increased from Rs 10,000 to Rs 12,000, the actual cost remains the same as the component of water storage has been linked to it. But the proposed unit cost for urban sanitation is lower than that for rural allocation. The SQUAT survey says that the minimum amount required for toilet construction is Rs 21,000. Hence, government should reconsider its proposed unit cost for IHHL in the rural and urban sanitation scheme.

Increase Allocation for IEC and Lay Out Infrastructure for Water Supply:

The SQUAT survey raised the issue of behavioural change of the rural inhabitants defecating in the open despite the availability of toilets. In SBA, the government has proposed to reduce the fund for IEC from 15% to 8% of the total budget, which will have a deleterious effect on the campaign. Like the previous sanitation programmes, the focus of SBA is more on the infrastructure, while it is important that IEC component cannot be cut down. Various studies by government and non-government agencies have highlighted the importance of IEC and training activities to sensitise people. The SBA guidelines allocate Rs 2,000 for water storage in each toilet which is not enough to put in place the infrastructure for water supply.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) election manifesto promised the provision

of potable drinking water for the entire population through piped water supply. It mentions that by 2050 the gap between supply and demand for water would be 50% and therefore it would work towards groundwater recharge, water harvesting and conservation and desalination plants in coastal areas. Although 93% of the population uses improved sources of drinking water supply, the problem of slip-back of habitations remains. No budget has been allocated under SBA for drinking water facilities. The problem of drinking water cannot have a one-stop solution; investments should be made on maintenance and rejuvenation of water resources.

Recruit People with Different Expertise and Increase the Skills and Capacities of the Existing Staff:

To address the issue of inadequate staff, SBA has merged the drinking water supply and sanitation departments to avoid unnecessary duplication and confusion. However, prior study by CBGA has clearly pointed to the problem of inadequacy of staff at various levels in both the departments.

The responsibility for the implementation of SBA lies with the states and there is shortage of trained staff at the state level. At the state level, the responsibility is with the public health engineering department which has more technical cadre than personnel with a development and sociology background. The staff shortage is starker at the gram panchayat level. The existing personnel are poorly trained and their skills are not upgraded. At the grass-roots level, it is not policy-making but implementation that needs to be focused upon, and this requires a wide range of talents varying from technical to soft skills. Here the challenge is more in terms of operations and maintenance on an ongoing basis. If user groups like the Village Water Supply and Sanitation Committee have to be made responsible for operation and maintenance, then they should be given appropriate orientation and technical training besides adequate financial and management support from the district/state authority. Has the Union Budget 2015-16 addressed this bottleneck in managerial, accounts and service delivery to ensure proper

implementation of the programme? The capacities of the panchayats should be raised and they should be provided with additional resources to improve their administrative capacities.

Increase Allocation for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers: In a caste-based society, the sanitation function has been forced upon Dalits. Without disassociating sanitation from Dalits and making cleanliness a common agenda of every citizen, SBA would not be able to achieve its objective. Due to the caste system, many Dalits work as manual scavengers without proper safety equipment. SBA also envisages the total eradication of manual scavenging. There are approximately 3.42 lakh manual scavengers yet to be rehabilitated as per a government report. It is a well-known fact that the rehabilitation process is patchy and is not being properly implemented. For instance, the Self-Employment Scheme of Liberation and Rehabilitation of Scavengers, under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, has

been facing the problem of fund utilisation for a long time.

Conclusions

Quite a bit of euphoria has been in the air with regard to the SBA, thanks to extensive media coverage. Responses to SBA can be categorised under two heads. On the one hand, the upper classes/castes have appreciated the effort; they envisage a business opportunity and visualise a dirt-free India (in their eyes, dirt is associated with the lower castes/classes). The upper classes/castes do not have to now feel ashamed in the company of their foreign partners anymore. On the other hand, a large section of population (the deprived) has no clue as to what has been going around in the name of *swachhta*. But one thing is for sure, without sufficient capital and well-trained labour, this mission may miss its deadline.

NOTES

- 1 *Times of India*, New Delhi, 1 January 2015.
- 2 Between the 1st Five Year Plan (FYP) and the end of 11th FYP, the government has spent approximately 1,45,000 crore on rural drinking water through various programmes despite water being a state subject.

- 3 Many international sanitation professionals and experts describe a "sanitation ladder" as ranging from open defecation to flush toilets with a piped sewer. Successive rungs on the ladder represent more hygienic and more expensive sanitation options. However, the sanitation ladder in India appears to be missing its middle rungs, with no intermediate steps on which households can gradually climb up from open defecation.
- 4 Earlier, it was Rs 15,000. But the Cabinet rejected the proposal and settled for Rs 12,000 per IHHL.

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