

Ambitious Campaign to Achieve an ODF District

To date, 321 Gram Panchayats (GPs, or village-level local governments) in Rajasthan have won the Nirmal Gram Puruskar (NGP), an incentive offered by the Government of India to those achieving Open-Defecation Free (ODF) and clean villages. While impressive, this figure represents less than four percent of the total number of Gram Panchayats in the state. It was widely believed that changing the sanitation behavior of the population in a state like Rajasthan is challenging, given the scarcity of water and the large expanses of land available for defecation. When a District Collector initiated a campaign to make the entire district of Churu ODF, this goal was largely dismissed as unrealistic.

To the surprise of many, however, within a few short months an entire block (sub-district) containing about 28 GPs, in addition to another 50 Gram Panchayats, effectively became ODF. The district is progressing swiftly towards declaring itself entirely ODF. A strong leadership with an active interest in promoting sanitation was at the heart of this change. The campaign was launched in November 2013, facilitated by Rohit Gupta who was named District Collector of Churu in October 2012 after having served in the same capacity in Jhalawar. Encouragement from senior political and administrative officials at the national, state, and district levels was useful in creating and maintaining the campaign's momentum.

Within a month, all key stakeholders in Churu district—including the Chairperson of Zilla Panchayat and other elected representatives—had embraced this common vision. They were able to witness the emergence of a mass community-led campaign that resulted in the cessation of open-defecation in more and more villages. Apart from the proactive leadership of the District Collector and Zilla Pramukh, the initiative's success is largely due to the campaign's design, which addressed all critical components, such as institutional arrangement, communication, capacity building, phasing, financing, monitoring and rewards, as detailed here.

Institutional Arrangement

A campaign of this scale would not have been possible without the robust institutional arrangements established at various levels.

District level

The District Sanitation Mission chaired by the Zilla Pramukh and co-chaired by the District Collector is the supreme authority overseeing the campaign. The Chief Executive Officer of the District Panchayat has a key role in this institution in his capacity as Member Secretary. District-level officers of various government departments are members of the mission. The mission is supported by a District Support Unit, headed by a District Coordinator and consisting of professional staff members in various fields responsible for running the campaign on a day-to-day basis, as well as by a District Resource Group, consisting of around 30 empanelled members. The resource persons are engaged on an as-needed basis to facilitate training and programs or Community-led Total Sanitation (CLTS) triggering in the villages.

Block level

At the block level, the campaign is facilitated by a core group, including the Pradhan (Chairperson of block panchayat), the SDM, the BDO, and the Block Coordinator.

Gram Panchayat level

At the Gram Panchayat level, the campaign is facilitated by a core group consisting of the Sarpanch, the GP Secretary, and a prabhari (a nodal officer selected from government staff posted in the GP). In addition, two motivators are engaged in selected Gram Panchayats to support the campaign.

Village/habitation level

For each habitation, a nigrani committee was instituted, including 10-20 natural leaders (natural leaders are identified during the process of community triggering, using CLTS techniques). To coordinate the nigrani committee, the GP-level prabhari is empowered to depute a village-level prabhari from among the ANMs, anganwadi workers, or school teachers.

Communication and Outreach

A district-specific communication strategy was developed by the stakeholders in the district, with support from the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Program (WSP). The key components of the communication strategy are:

Branding of the campaign focused on dignity and pride

The campaign's behavior-change communication strategy is based on dignity and pride within the community. The branding of the campaign is done through the following initiatives:

- The campaign is named 'Chokho Churu' (chokho means 'clean and beautiful' in the local dialect).
- An attractive logo is used to represent the 'Chokho Churu' campaign, with design support from WSP.
- A stencil of Chokho Ghar (a clean and beautiful house) is painted on households having stopped open-defecation.
- Recognition boards are placed at government offices marking ODF Gram Panchayats as Chokho.

Target the community rather than individuals

The district decided to focus all of its communication on achieving community outcomes, such as making entire villages, Gram Panchayats, and Blocks ODF, rather than encouraging individual outputs, such as the construction of household toilets. This strategy was based on the realization that widespread behavior change is influenced to a greater extent by community norms than by individual preferences. Targeting the community as a whole also creates a social pressure among its members, motivating all people to construct and use toilets.

Community-led approach

Prior experiences revealed that the campaign would be successful only insofar as it was community-led. While CLTS triggering is effective in achieving the sort of immediate and collective action critical to the campaign's success, the

target population's expectation of subsidies can seriously undermine this approach. To counter such expectations, it was necessary to communicate at all levels that the government's financial support under Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan was in fact an incentive, which would be provided only to those households that constructed their toilets themselves. This prompted the community to act immediately after triggering by the district resource group, rather than waiting for government support in undertaking construction and embracing behavior change.

Focus on interpersonal communication

The campaign in the context of a Gram Panchayat begins with two days of intensive triggering and a community outreach program facilitated by the district resource group. This exercise, implemented under the direct supervision of District Coordinator Shyam Lal and following a systematic calendar, ensures the establishment of an enabling environment for the campaign with the proper communication strategy in all Gram Panchayats.

Integrated campaign

Chokho Churu has been on the discussion agenda in all government outreach programs, whether in the context of rathri chopal (meetings held at night to promote development schemes) or prashasan gaon ka sangh (a state-level government campaign to promote rural schemes).

Capacity Building

A campaign on this scale requires intensive capacity development programs targeting various stakeholders, which has been supported by the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Program (WSP). The WSP engaged expert agencies and resource personnel to facilitate various training programs. Most notably, a five-day training program on Community-led Total Sanitation (CLTS) was arranged for motivators and resource group members, facilitated by Feedback Ventures. Similarly, technology training programs were facilitated in all blocks by the distinguished expert Shrikant Navrekar. In addition, the WSP enlisted the support of Bhorukha Charitable Trust, which provided two full-time

consultants (with expertise in communication and capacity development as well as in monitoring and evaluation) for the regular capacity development of PRI members, motivators, and nodal officers through routine meetings and field visits.

Phasing

The campaign was launched in Tarangar block with a one-day workshop led by the District Collector and Zilla Pramukh in November 2012. The selection of Tarangar block as the kick-off site helped to provide a necessary momentum for the 'Chokho Churu' campaign. Thanks to the proactive leadership of SDM Haritima, BDOs Imilal Saran, and Gopiram Mehla, along with that of Pradhan Ankori Devi Kaswa, all the GPs in the block became ODF within two months. This accomplished, the campaign was extended to Sardarseher and Churu blocks in January 2013. By May 2013, the campaign was further extended to the entire district, covering all six blocks. This phased approach and the success of Tarangar block not only helped the stakeholders to gain confidence but also helped to elucidate and replicate successful strategies from the project's initial phases.

Financing

It is widely known from the experience of implementing CRSP that providing toilets alone would not ensure the desired result. The true indicator of real and sustainable behavior change would be for people to construct toilets for themselves. However, the financial circumstances of poor households do not always permit this sort of undertaking, a fact that cannot be ignored. The district administration made every effort to provide labor through MGNREGA and to release NBA incentives immediately after the desired outcomes were achieved. The available incentives were transferred to Gram Panchayats and the GP then transferred them directly to the bank accounts of all eligible households that had constructed and were using toilets. To enable this, sanctions were completed for all eligible households before starting the two-day triggering exercise at the GP level. Since government support is guaranteed for the poor, wealthier portions of the population joined shop

keepers in providing materials on credit to poor households in their communities in order to make their villages ODF and achieve recognition and dignity for the entire community.

Because people are motivated to construct and use toilets as a matter of pride, dignity, and health and not in order to obtain a government subsidy, people in Churu construct toilets of their own preference, mostly of a higher value than those covered in the government incentive. Since people are allowed to construct toilets according to their preference, even poor households invest additional resources, considering long-term usage. In many cases, they even construct an additional bathroom alongside the toilet. Nevertheless, the district administration ensured that appropriate technologies are used for toilets by showcasing various toilet designs and by training masons.

Monitoring and Verification

Traditionally, government sanitation programs monitor the number of toilets. But a campaign that aims to make more and more villages ODF has to monitor nothing but the number of ODF villages. This shift in monitoring outcomes rather than outputs has been evident in routine review meetings at the district and block levels. All are concerned about how many ODF Gram Panchayats are achieved in each block. Additionally, a monitoring board was installed at the office of the District Collector with the names of all GPs and highlighting those of ODF Gram Panchayats in green.

The campaign also adopted multi-staged verification of ODF claims by Gram Panchayats. During the campaign, many GPs displayed maps of villages in a public building with all households marked either red or green, depending on the status of toilet use. Once all households were marked green, the Gram Panchayat would send a resolution to the BDO claiming ODF status. After verification at the block level, the BDO would forward the resolution to the district support unit. The district then sent a team of independent evaluators to the concerned GPs to do physical verification. The team would transect the village during the early hours of the day to observe any open-defecation. If the

team was convinced that open-defecation had completely ceased in the GP, they would recommend declaring it ODF. Once declared as ODF, a board would be installed at the office of the GP, named as Chokhi Gram Panchayat, meaning clean and beautiful Gram Panchayat.

In addition, the Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj arranged an inter-district verification in April 2013 by sending different stakeholders—including officers of Zilla Parishads and other departments, as well as elected representatives from seven districts—to do physical verification of the ODF status of Taranagar block. The team was impressed by the amount of effort invested by various actors leading to quality results. This process not only helped to validate Taranagar as the first ODF block in Rajasthan, but also acted as an exposure visit for key stakeholders, motivating them to initiate similar campaigns in other districts.

Rewards and Recognition

Rewards and recognition played a major role in motivating PRIs and communities. For many, the very notion of becoming an ODF community and receiving the associated recognition was sufficient motivation to work hard towards the goal. Achieving ODF status is made mandatory by the DSM to issue sanction of funds up to 20 lakhs for SLWM projects under NBA. For the first batch of GPs, the check of 20 lakhs was presented as a reward for achieving ODF by the Chief Minister in a public function. This has become an effective motivating factor encouraging Sarpanchs to initiate and lead an ODF campaign. In addition, the District Collector awards certificates of recognition to the best performing Sarpanchs and nodal officers from time to time. Most notably, the Chief Minister of Rajasthan awarded Rohit Gupta, the District Collector, on Independence Day in 2013, recognizing the remarkable results of the campaign.

Key Learning

The following are the key factors that contributed to the success of the 'Chokho Churu' campaign:

- To achieve the desired results, the NBA was implemented in a campaign mode.
- Administrative and political priority was critical for initiating a successful campaign.
- An effective institutional arrangement was instituted to facilitate the campaign.
- The campaign was designed in such a way that the community takes initiative rather than waiting for government support. The government's financial support is delivered effectively as incentives and rewards for community-level outcomes.
- An effective communication strategy promoting the community-led approach was adopted. In each village the campaign starts with a two-day intensive community outreach and triggering exercise to motivate the community to change its behavior for reasons of dignity and pride.
- Nigrani committees are coordinated by prabhari in each village to provide regular follow-up after the triggering exercise.
- Capacity development was undertaken for using the CLTS approach and with respect to technology options.
- No contractors or NGOs were hired to construct the toilets. Toilets were constructed by the users themselves, according to their individual preferences and by investing their own efforts and resources.
- Incentives available under NBA were directly transferred to beneficiaries' bank accounts.
- Available funds for SLWM under NBA have been used as an effective community reward for achieving ODF status. (*Source : MDWS*)

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