

Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum

Understanding Swachh Bharat Abhiyan through a Gender Lens

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BRIEFING NOTE 20

HIGHLIGHTS / KEY POINTS

- Even though SBA is a cleanliness drive, it is restricted to activities such as sweeping and construction of new toilets while omitting environmental health and pollution in its premise.
- Caste based inequities and discrimination against women and socially excluded groups continue to characterize water and sanitation programmes in rural and urban areas.
- The employment of manual scavengers remains an important concern despite it being a non-bailable offence to hire them.
- Government financing of sanitation has to be viewed in the context of recent changes in the country's fiscal architecture.
- Viewing toilets as only being for women, children, the elderly and infirm seek to only reinforce negative stereotypes.
- A 'Swachh Bharat' could only be achieved by making both women and men key stakeholders in the programme.

This policy brief lays out the discussion and the key recommendations from the Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum that was organized by the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) in conjunction with the Heinrich Böll Foundation on July 6th 2016. Three speakers were invited for the forum that was chaired by Gagan Sethi who is a co-chair of the consultative group set up by the Planning Commission of India to draft voluntary agency policy. Priyanka Dutt, the country director for BBC Media Action, in her presentation focused on communicating with women and men as agents of change in sanitation. Anjor Bhaskar, a researcher and an activist who works on sustainable development, underscored how real cleanliness demanded an actual transformation of the way we perceived the people who helped us manage our lives from our waste pickers to our sewage cleaners. Finally, Kanika Kaul, a senior programme officer with the Center for Budget and Governance Accountability, underlined some key gender based challenges in the context of sanitation and discussed to what extent some of these are rooted in the budgetary outlays and design of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Based on the forum discussions, this brief attempts to understand the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan through multiple contexts of gender and caste, and how it impacts and is in turn impacted by various concerns such as waste management, hygiene, and health.

The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) launched on October 2nd 2014 marks the beginning of the largest programme on sanitation by the government till date (Kaul, 2015). Seeking to achieve an open defecation free India by the year 2019 by constructing and promoting

sustained usage of individual, community and cluster toilets; it also attempts to eradicate manual scavenging by adopting modern and scientific municipal solid and liquid waste management techniques. The SBA seeks to achieve this by laying water pipelines in all villages, thus enabling tap connection into households on demand by 2019¹. Despite being preceded by the 'Central Rural Sanitation Programme' (CRSP) in 1986, the 'Total Sanitation Campaign' in 1999 and the 'Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan' (NBA) in 2012, the SBA remains substantially different to its predecessors². First, more decentralized than the NBA, the SBA considers the district as the base unit for implementing its strategies. Second, it plans to prompt 'behavior change' instead of introducing incentives such as the 'Nirmal Gram Puraskars' as were offered under the NBA.

Financing Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

Kanika Kaul highlighted that government financing of sanitation has to be viewed in the context of recent changes in the country's fiscal architecture. These include acceptance of the recommendations of the Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC) by the Union Government and the Chief Minister's Sub-group Report on Rationalisation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes. In the context of rural sanitation, an analysis of select states reveals that while in 2015-16, public spending on sanitation has increased in some states, (such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Odisha), in some others (such as Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana) it has declined. It is equally important to take note of the reduced government spending on rural drinking water in 2015-16 in some states (such as Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu) which is inextricably linked with sanitation (Agarwala and Ali, 2016). The construction of the Community Sanitary Complexes (CSC), which are important from a gender perspective, was hindered by the restrictive guidelines for these that specify that CSCs can only be built when there is lack of space in the village for construction of household toilets and by requiring a compulsory contribution of 10 percent by the community³. It is worth noting that,

only 1109 CSCs were built in 2014-15 and 867 CSCs in 2015-16.⁴

A critical component of the rural sanitation programmes- 'individual household latrines' also increased only marginally. Usage of toilets also remains affected by the lack of water. The Swachhta Status Report by the NSSO shows that only 42.5% households in rural India vs. 87.9% households in urban India were found to have access to water for use in toilets (NSSO, 2016). Gender responsive features did figure in the SBA by making the Above Poverty Line women headed households eligible for subsidies and prioritizing widow pensioners, pregnant and lactating mothers under maternity programmes and covering the girl children through any scheme benefiting the girl child⁵. However, no significant resources were earmarked for the 'menstrual hygiene management recognized in the guidelines issued by the ministry of drinking water and sanitation⁶. It is mentioned that funds for this could be taken from the IEC component, which were already reduced (from 15 percent under Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan to 8 percent under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan), and the SWLM components for setting up incinerators in schools. Likewise, the SBA will have to focus less on PPP's and more on ways to sustainably empower communities so that an open conversation on open-defecation could become a part of the larger discourse on sanitation and cleanliness⁷.

Manual Scavenging and Pathways to Social Exclusion

Despite it being a non-bailable offence to hire manual scavengers, the employment of manual scavengers remains an important concern as is the issue of emptying pits of toilets that fill up eventually, a problem that remains unaddressed by the SBA. Census 2011 reported 12.76 lakh insanitary latrines and 5.9 lakh dry latrines were cleaned manually in rural areas. Socio-economic caste census reports further found 1,82,505 persons engaged in manual scavenging. Manual scavengers who earn about \$5 a day usually wear no protective gear while standing in the waste that

reaches chest high or when they crawl through the sewage to clear jams (Partha, 2014). Mumbai's municipal corporation found 1,386 conservancy workers to have died over the last six years since 2009 (Limaye, 2016). Moreover, an average of 20 sewer workers die every month due to suffocation or exposure to toxic gases and accidents in Mumbai (Partha, 2014). In fact, social workers estimate that almost 100 sewer workers die each year across India (Limaye, 2016). Moreover 80% of the workers die before the age of 60 because of work-related health problems, as suggested by the findings of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Partha, 2014). In fact Harnam Singh, the chairman of the Delhi Safai Karamchari Commission (Delhi cleaners commission), estimated that almost 70 per cent of the manual scavengers die on the job (Miller, 2012) and an estimated 61 sewer divers died in the last six months alone (Miller, 2012). Besides according to the government's figures, more than 95% of the sewer workers are members of India's lowest social class, the Dalits (Partha, 2014). Unsurprisingly therefore, caste based inequities and discrimination against women and socially excluded groups continue to characterize rural water and sanitation programmes.

This is also reflected in the inequitable access to sanitation. Census 2011 reports that while the total proportion of rural households with toilets within premises is 30.6 percent, the household toilet coverage for SC and ST households is less than 23 percent and 16 percent respectively. Likewise, 35% of the total rural population has access to water within premises, compared to 28% of scheduled castes (SC) and 14% of scheduled tribes (ST) households in rural areas (Kaul, 2015). It is important to note that due to caste-based discrimination SC households have been largely concentrated in the peripheral areas with limited and erratic water supply. Similarly, tribal populations have been located in geographically isolated terrains restraining access to water and escalating costs of construction of toilets. However, as all speakers pointed out, SBA fails to mention caste and its related impact on socially excluded groups in the rural SBA manual either.

Using humiliation as a strategy for launching a counter-narrative of shame and shaming without addressing the caste-gender complex that sustains it, the SBA reproduces the oppressive roles and is essentially regressive⁸. Gagan Sethi contended that there was a wide disparity between the SBA vs. the way Gandhi engaged in cleanliness drives by heralding the manual scavengers as 'Harijans' who were children of god. The SBA, which claims to be inspired by Gandhian ideals and began by cleaning valmiki bastis, fails to address the specific issues of the 'valmikis' and the manual scavengers. Kanika Kaul also highlighted that despite the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment implementing Self-Employment Schemes for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers, such schemes were inadvertently affected by the low budgetary outlays and low utilization of allocated funds. (

Solid Waste Management and its Impact on Women

Solid waste management in India, as elucidated by Anjor Bhaskar, takes place largely through the dumping of waste, burning waste outside homes, and collection and transportation of waste outside the city; with only 10% of the waste produced in cities being recycled by the informal sector. With nearly 1 million women being engaged in waste picking and scrap sorting following the flexibility and independence that it offers, the occupation remains riddled with its own concerns. Very poor working conditions, harassment (sexual, verbal, administrative), exploitation by the police, occupational hazards (filth, animals, sharp objects), physical strain of carrying huge loads on their heads leading to backache and vaginal rupture, low social status, lack of access to public services and high prevalence of alcoholism and tobacco consumption, due to the dirty work involved are some of the pressing concerns⁹.

Anjor Bhaskar further expanded on the role of the SWaCH (Solid Waste Collection and Handling or, officially SWaCH Seva Sahakari Sanstha Maryadit, Pune) that is India's first wholly owned cooperative of self-employed waste pickers or waste collectors

and other urban poor. SWaCH has offered a competitive new model of waste management by rebuilding their respect and empowering the workers by constructing dedicated sorting sheds for them, through educational interventions, health insurance coverage provisions, making people responsible for their own waste and offering rebate on property taxes for those who recycle their own waste. It is a model that is focused on decentralisation, waste handlers instead of heavy technology, is women worker centric, saves cost of municipality, offers increased incomes, employment, better working conditions, and encourages reduced consumption of intoxicants and alcohol; and has been found to lower domestic violence. However, with success usually coming in with its own risks, Anjor Bhaskar maintained how waste pickers often did not get enough scrap, risked being marginalized, and binaries were created between men and women when women did not enter the scrap trade, that made it important to protect their right to waste, and their right to their livelihoods.

Gender Concerns

With hygiene and safe sanitation practices closely linked up with the safety and well-being of women, discussions on gender at the forum testified to how lack of adequate sanitation intensified their vulnerabilities towards various physical, public health and psycho-social risks. With women bearing most of the workload for managing sanitation and hygiene at home, Kanika Kaul reasoned that their dependence on public provisioning of essential services tended to be higher than that of men. In fact women were found to be worst affected by the lack of sanitation, as Priyanka Dutt showed how 24 % of girls dropped out of school for lack of toilets as many facilities did not have toilets (Boyd, 2014). This problem was exacerbated when they reached menarche, leading to a huge loss to the individual, community, family and the country. And most people were aware of this. Priyanka Dutt cited how privacy (56% in Rajasthan, 44% in Bihar) and convenience (65% in Rajasthan, 42% in Bihar) along with security for women and children (65% in Rajasthan and 46%

in Bihar) were cited as the biggest benefits of using latrines (WSP 2012). The need for enclosed bathing spaces within the home also failed to find recognition in the SBA. The construction of community sanitary complexes (CSC's) was also hindered by the mandated 10% contribution by communities, lack of water supply and poor maintenance.

Priyanka Dutt, who admitted having had an opportunity to look at what was driving the SBA to work, documenting sanitation champions, people and communities who took a stand, along with different levels of society that came together to ensure something changed- that women were actually leading the change in several places. However, she agreed that over emphasizing the dignity of women as a rationale for toilet construction and usage has foreseeable pitfalls of toilets becoming a commodity of women and the elderly. This approach may reinforce the perception of masculinity and power attached with open defecation and not target the healthy young men, who usually are the first ones to relapse to defecating in the open¹⁰. Of course, Priyanka Dutt agreed women to be worst affected by lack of sanitation with their safety at risk because of open defecation that consequently restricted productivity and opportunities. These women often waited until dark to use open spaces or drink less water and modify their diet (Kaul, 2015). In fact 30% of marginalized women were violently assaulted every year as the lack of basic sanitation forced them to travel long distances to meet their needs (Boyd, 2014). Priyanka Dutt as well recounted how women felt vulnerable to violence when venturing out of home to defecate, and reported fear of rape or assault.

The scale of open defecation is significant. Data showed that despite having toilets in the home men continued with open defecation. According to Government of India's Swachhta Status Report 2016, 52% of the rural population defecates in open. Of households that have built toilets in the last 18 months, there is still a significant percentage of households where at least one member of the household continues to defecate in the open – usually the men of the house. Nearly 9

out of 10 non-users in toilet owning households in Bihar, and nearly 7 out of 10 non-users in toilet owning households in Rajasthan are men (WSP, 2012). Therefore, targeting women alone was like preaching to the choir as women were already more likely to adopt safe sanitation practices than men in any case¹¹.

Priyanka Dutt believed women to be safe sanitation champions who influenced their husbands to build toilets. In fact study findings suggest how the decision to build a toilet was influenced by the spouse in 57% of the cases in Rajasthan and 51-61% in Bihar (WSP, 2012). Women also motivated others to practice safe sanitation, as depicted in the case of Reesa Maurya, a frontline health worker in Uttar Pradesh who not only practiced proper sanitation in her own house but also enabled the entire village to construct toilet and lead their own fight against regressive social practices¹². As a result of increased awareness about safe sanitation, women in Himachal Pradesh came together to end an age-old practice of having to live in cattle-sheds during menstruation¹³.

Targeting only women reinforced the idea that toilets were domains restricted to women much like the kitchen¹⁴. Priyanka Dutt maintained how people who were most likely to use latrines were those with the least decision-making authority in the household like the young women and the elderly. Viewing toilets as only being for women, children, the elderly and infirm sought to only reinforce negative stereotypes. Toilets as a preserver of women's honor and dignity just fortified notions of purdah, and further contained women's mobility and agency. Representations of women as fragile, and as needing their honor and dignity to be preserved in fact did significant damage to the wider discourse on women's equality and status in society¹⁵. Focusing on women alone suggested that men could continue to defecate and urinate in the open. Men defecating in the open only fortified the general perception that everyone defecates in the open. Such representations coupled with the less scope for women participating in decision-making processes of sanitation programmes acted as an additional barrier that worked against the SBA.

Reflections on Policy Implications

Misinterpretation and weak implementation of budgetary strategies such as Scheduled Caste Sub Plan, Tribal Sub Plan and gender responsive budgeting further restricted the scope of addressing inequity in drinking water and sanitation programmes¹⁶. Moreover, slow progress of the SBA with just about 18% of the targeted 100,000 community and public toilet seats to be built by March 2016 (Dasgupta and Kumar, 2015), charges of money laundering (Zee News, 2016), and solid waste management issues (Pulakkat, 2015) are some of the concerns that continue to plague the programme.

- **SBA vs. Gandhi:** Gagan Sethi in his overview pointed out how the SBA planned to induce behavioural change through narratives of shame as opposed to Gandhi's active engagement with caste as was visible in his efforts to end untouchability. The SBA instead with its lack of mention of caste and women seemed to 'invisibilise' the larger discourses. Quoting the SQUAT survey, 2014, Gagan Sethi narrated, "We found that people have a very expensive idea of what constitutes a latrine, and do not build the kinds of simple latrines that save lives and reduce open defecation in other countries. 40% of households that have a working latrine have at least one person who regularly defecates in the open. Less than half of the people who own a government latrine use it regularly. Half of the people who defecate in the open say that they do so because it is pleasurable, comfortable and convenient"¹⁷. The survey also revealed how people did not already use the existing community toilets as sharing space was not an acceptable contract to them. The usage of toilets was in fact deeply segregated on the lines of religion, caste, and gender. Also, despite having toilets many members did not believe in the concept and enjoyed defecating outside.
- **Pollution and the SBA:** Even though SBA is a cleanness drive, Gagan Sethi argued that it had remained restricted to activities such as sweeping and construction of new toilets while

omitting environmental health and pollution in its premise. He further stated that despite significant efforts being taken in terms of air pollution, activities have largely centered around the urban areas. The forest clearance policy had become arbitrary with the timeline for the approval of the projects reduced to 45 days, which meant that a project would be deemed approved if no clearance report emerged in 45 days. Likewise, efforts to contain air pollution were concentrated in the urban areas. Even water pollution did not figure as a key concern except for pollution of the Ganga. Without adequate supply of water to maintain clean toilets, the NSSO survey reveals that barely half of the toilets built under the SBA are being used (Sharma, 2015).

- **Hand wash and hygiene:** Enough attention is also not given to the crucial role of hand washing with soap after defecation by building simple concepts of handwash and hygiene into the SBA. An essential part of the 'food chain' the SBA needs to be placed in a broader perspective, by focusing on the existing workers, creating conditions to improve their living conditions and livelihood security, and enabling them to contribute much more significantly towards cleanliness. Moreover SBA formulations at the center need to be accompanied by similar formulations at the state/ district level that also address the sanitation needs of the urban poor in unauthorized colonies with a greater role designated for the urban educated classes to take forward the programme.
- **Community toilets:** With community toilets being paid, especially in slums, pay and use system affects women more because they are charged for using the toilets whereas men pay only for defecation and not urination. Women have been embarrassed to distinguish between the two and specify to the male guard posted outside these toilets. Moreover, most men and women toilets have been constructed right next to each other, which make it frightening

and uncomfortable for women to access such toilets. Subsequently, transgender people have no toilets to access for themselves.

The 'no toilet, no bride' campaign was launched by the government in an effort to improve sanitation after it emerged that more people in India had a mobile phone contract as opposed to access to a toilet, sets an exemplary standard worth emulating (Malm, 2012). The initiative that is a part of the state's Mukhyamantri Kanyadan Yojna (MKY), a programme launched in 2006 to help poor women marry, required all grooms who wished to participate in a mass marriage ceremony to send a photo of themselves with their toilet, or prove their intent to install one within 30 days of the marriage (The Huffington Post, 2013). The toilet requirement, which required grooms to prove that their homes contain a toilet in order to receive the MKY benefits, was introduced in 2011 (The Huffington Post, 2013). With more than 1,700 couples having been married under the MKY in 2013, the programme attempted to address the rape of girls and women who went out to relieve themselves in the open particularly in the early morning and late evenings (The Huffington Post, 2013). In fact the BBC reported how 400 women would have 'escaped' rape in 2012 if they had a toilet in their homes (The Huffington Post, 2013).

Health, as all speakers agreed, is a very distant notion that becomes important only when we do not have it. The success of the SBA largely depends upon the ability of the state governments, line ministries and other actors to own the programme and how well it is able to address the concerns of women and other socially excluded groups who depend on the public provisioning of sanitation, the most (Kaul, 2015). A 'Swachh Bharat' as all speakers agreed, could only be achieved by making both women and men key stakeholders in the programme. Men needed to be responsible for their own behavior, rather than for the safety and dignity of women. Finally, women needed to be represented as drivers of change and not just the passive recipients of change for SBA to take flight.

Endnotes

- ¹ Anjor Bhaskar at GEP Discussion Forum XX, 6th July 2016
- ² Gagan Sethi at GEP Discussion Forum XX, 6th July 2016
- ³ Kanika Kaul at GEP Discussion Forum XX, 6th July 2016
- ⁴ As reported in the Outcome Budget, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.
- ⁵ Kanika Kaul at GEP Discussion Forum XX, 6th July 2016
- ⁶ Kanika Kaul at GEP Discussion Forum XX, 6th July 2016
- ⁷ Gagan Sethi at GEP Discussion Forum XX, 6th July 2016
- ⁸ Gagan Sethi at GEP Discussion XX, 6th July 2016
- ⁹ Anjor Bhaskar at GEP Discussion XX, 6th July 2016
- ¹⁰ Priyanka Dutt at GEP Discussion Forum XX, 6th July 2016
- ¹¹ Priyanka Dutt at GEP Discussion Forum XX, 6th July 2016
- ¹² Priyanka Dutt at GEP Discussion Forum XX, 6th July 2016
- ¹³ Priyanka Dutt at GEP Discussion Forum XX, 6th July 2016
- ¹⁴ Priyanka Dutt at GEP Discussion Forum XX, 6th July 2016
- ¹⁵ Priyanka Dutt at GEP Discussion Forum, 6th July 2016
- ¹⁶ Priyanka Dutt at GEP Discussion Forum, 6th July 2016
- ¹⁷ <http://riceinstitute.org/data/squat/>

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Speakers at the Forum

Chair:

Gagan Sethi: Gagan Sethi is a Development educator and practicing Organizational Development expert and a Gender trainer. As founder of Janvikas, he has helped set up several strategic organizations in the country, for example Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, Sahjeevan, Drishti, Centre for Social justice, HID forum to name a few.

Panelists:

Priyanka Dutt: Priyanka Dutt is Country Director India for BBC Media Action, the BBC's international NGO that uses media and communication to inform, empower and connect people around the world.

Anjor Bhaskar: Anjor Bhaskar is a researcher and an activist who works with organizations of informal waste workers and with research organizations such as the Institute of Human Development.

Kanika Kaul: Kanika Kaul works as a Senior Programme Officer with the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability specializing in research and capacity building efforts on Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB).

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