From forests to backyards: learning of CLTS interventions in tribal district of Dantewada, Chhattisgarh, India

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Preferring Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) for sustainable and large scale sanitation coverage across the nation, the Government of India (GOI) launched the Swachh Bharat Mission in 2014 aiming to make the country open defecation free (ODF) by October 2, 2019. This paper attempts to understand the strategies, challenges and innovative solutions, key drivers triggering collective behaviour change and measures taken to ensure sustainability in hard to reach tribal district of Dantewada. Further it examines the experienced benefits of toilets from 102 first time toilet users belonging to ODF communities, who stopped defecating in forests and are now using toilets constructed at their own backyards. Qualitative data was collected through questionnaire and interviews which categorizes the benefits of toilets as experienced by these respondents. The key drivers of the successful CLTS implementation are shared along with the findings and learning.

Introduction

Dantewada, also known as South Bastar District, is a small district on the southern tip of the state of Chhattisgarh in India and shares its boundaries with the states of Maharashtra, Telangana and Odisha. The district is home to nearly 0.25 million people, out of which more than 75 percent belong to scheduled tribes, living in and off the forests that they inhabit. Gond is the major tribe with nearly 60 percent population and the remaining ones include Halba, Muriya and Maria tribes. The district comprises of 4 development blocks which cover 124 Gram Panchayats (GPs), the primary units of elected local self government in the rural areas.

At the time of the launch of Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin (SBM-G) in October 2014, the sanitation coverage of the district was less than 10 percent, with all 124 GPs remaining to be declared as ODF. To make entire country Open Defecation Free (ODF) within next five years was not an easy task. Approach was the key to success. The impact and results Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) had been showing across the world was the only option to make this happen. The power of collective community action and the quick and effective results of CLTS (Kar, 2008) had proven that how things change very rapidly. Being a participatory and empowering approach, it engages communities in a manner that stimulates self analysis and collective local action to put as end to open defecation (Kumar and Shukla, 2011). This CLTS intervention supported by UNICEF, sought to combine CLTS tools and techniques with other social mobilization methods ensuring multi-stakeholder engagement at various levels to achieve credible Open Defecation Free (ODF) results with speed and on scale. The key components of the strategy adopted included the following: capacity building; institutional strengthening; and ODF celebrations. During February 2015, a team of 30 trained CLTS facilitators was constituted to help implement SBM-G in the district. This worked well and by 2016 the coverage reached to 40 percent and very rapidly the entire district of Dantewada was declared ODF on November 1, 2017 in just a matter of 30 months since CLTS inception.
Strategies

Capacity building
A team of about 30 members, both male and female, was identified at the district level and was trained on CLTS approach and methodology. The trained team members at the district level trained Community Motivators or Preraks, primarily in CLTS triggering tools and techniques and the subsequent follow-up exercises leading up to the ODF status of the communities involved. First 5 days training was conducted for this batch in February 2015 after which the team was deployed at Jhodiabadam GP. Here, the triggering was so impactful that Balram Kashyap, who lost his right hand in an accident, took this as a challenge and constructed a toilet for his family in just three days on his own. He proudly said, “there is nothing bigger than self respect and for self respect, he can do anything”. His story soon spread to nearby villages and he also joined the movement. Visits by senior officials and their sitting, listening and learning from natural leaders can be a potent source of insight, inspiration and commitment (Chambers, 2009), similarly the district officials and community facilitators were trained to gather more and more information and gain knowledge for implementing CLTS effectively.

Jhodiabadam: the first GP to become ODF
In just a matter of two months, the GP with 212 households (HH) became ODF. This GP of Gidam Development Block showed very positive results of CLTS implementation. The effective community triggering sessions and continuous follow-ups brought success. The key player in this achievement was none other than Balram Kashyap who came up as the natural leader, who paved the way for this achievement. The community formally declared itself as ODF on April 16, 2015 followed by a grand ODF celebration on May 5, 2015. This event was organized by the community wherein the district officials, public representatives and people from other GPs were invited. This event was again a motivating factor for other GPs to gear up themselves and work together towards ODF district.

Institutional strengthening
The success of Jhodiabadam led to a mass movement across other GPs. Soon the motivated Sarpanch (Elected Public Representative of GP) and community leaders wanted their GPs also to have CLTS sessions and be ODF. Such GPs were then identified by the District Sanitation Cell (DSC) and community motivators were deployed to initiate CLTS campaigns. As a dedicated task force was required for the task, DSC was suggested by the UNICEF consultants to form groups at Para, GP, Block and District levels so that a large pool of motivators could be created to scale up CLTS implementation in the district. People from education, health, rural development, Zilla Panchayat (statutory body at district level), media etc. were then joined in and were trained as CLTS facilitators/motivators. A number of sessions were also conducted for community leaders, public representatives and school kids for creating critical awareness among them about sanitation. Sanitation was made the most important program in the district. The District Collector and the Chief Executive Officer Zilla Panchayat led the entire program in a mission mode.

ODF celebrations
Tribal communities love celebrations to mark their major occasions and achievements. This was taken as an opportunity to acknowledge their effort as well as a motivating factor for others to end open defecation (OD) by opting safe toilet solutions. The presence of senior district officials, public representatives and natural leaders made these celebrations eminently attractive and inspiring for all others. The feeling of self respect and success could easily be seen on the faces of the tribal people. The performances by school children and tribal dances made the celebration more colorful and entertaining. The GP would also receive prizes from district administration and public representatives like LED TVs, cash incentives and other developmental appreciations. Few GPs also introduced marriages and other auspicious celebrations in this event.

Bottlenecks

Fear of Naxals, left wing extremist group
The district is one of the most naxal affected regions in the country. The geography makes it a suitable base for naxals as the forests offer safe hide-outs to them for carrying out their operations. There are more than 40 GPs which lie in the interior areas of naxals controlled territory. Any government or social activity is
impossible to be conducted in these GPs. Communities could not be contacted in any situation. Initially these GPs were not taken for CLTS implementation.

Solution: As other GPs started becoming ODF, communications through wall paintings, ODF celebrations, rallies and public gatherings on sanitation acted as tools to attract communities residing in these remote and inaccessible locations. Slowly people from these GPs also started constructing toilets on their own with material available there.

Difficult terrain
Dantewada is covered with dense forests and hills. Indravati river flows across the region with no bridge making it very difficult for the people residing here to commute. Usually they walk cross the river when it is not too deep. During rainy season these people are almost disconnected from the district headquarters and main markets. There are barely any roads to the villages which further makes their lives tough and harsh. The huts are also scattered far apart and unevenly distributed.

Solution: Regular community meetings and effective use of trigger tools generating feelings of shame, dignity and self-esteem helped to encourage the communities and raised self confidence and enthusiasm of these tribal groups. It negated these challenges and they geared up for making their habitations ODF and successfully achieved it.

Low literacy rate
The literacy is too low in this region due to tribal customs, terrain and naxalism. People in general are not exposed to outsiders and try to evade community meetings and CLTS sessions. CLTS experts also faced language barriers as few tribal communities did not understand the common link language of Hindi.

Solution: During CLTS triggering sessions, smart and communicative youth from the tribal villages, who understood and spoke a bit of Hindi, were gradually incorporated as CLTS motivators in CLTS triggering teams. Moreover, DSC tirelessly visited these habitations and motivated the tribal people for collective behaviour change and adoption of safe toilet technology solutions. They helped the people understand the problems and consequences of OD and construct twin pit leech toilets with locally available materials.

Low income communities
The tribal here depend largely on forest produce for their livelihoods. Such produce is further sold in local markets at very marginal prices or through barter system. It was a huge challenge for them to procure material for construction of toilets.

Solution: Experts helped them innovate ideas to utilize locally available materials for toilet construction. Rocks and sand from river beds were collected and used for construction of the pits and toilet platforms. They only had to purchase toilet pan and pipes for connecting it to pits. Everyone supported each other in toilet construction and collectively said no to open defecation and finally made the entire district ODF.

Collective behaviour change: key drivers
In a matter of almost 30 months since the inception of CLTS campaign in February 2015, the district got declared as ODF on November 1, 2017. It took some innovative techniques and few locally invented triggering tools to ignite behaviour change among the tribal communities inhabiting this region. The following are few of the key drivers which made this dramatic shift from hundred percent open defecation to a hundred percent open defecation free status in a relatively short period:

• Innovative triggering tools: Usually these people used Tendu (Diospyros melanoxylon) leaves to clean themselves after defecation. This leaf is used for making Beedi (Indian Cigar) and is sold for good sum of money, average INR 1 for a leaf or 65 leaves for 1 USD. This calculation was used to let them understand the total amount they would waste by using it for wiping themselves after defecation.
• Model Toilets: The CLTS motivators identified the weakest of the HH and constructed a twin leech pit toilet as a model so that other may observe and learn and construct their toilets accordingly.
• Role of Natural Leaders: Natural Leaders played an important role in spreading awareness and motivating the communities to end OD and go for safe toilet technology options.
• ODF Celebrations: ODF celebrations by communities helped create interest and awareness among neighbouring communities, who followed the suite and ended up making themselves ODF over a relatively shorter period of time.
• Deployment of CLTS experts: UNICEF supported the campaign to a great extent by providing CLTS expert consultants from Knowledge Links who brought all the ends together and implemented smart strategies to make the district ODF.

• Support from the District Administration and Public Representatives: The support from the district administration and public representatives had a great impact on the progress and acceleration of CLTS implementation. Their involvement made sanitation a high priority public agenda and brought visibility and legitimacy to the ODF campaign in the district.

• Women in the lead: Several groups of women were formed who led this campaign like a mass movement. “Danteshwari Sewa Sangh”, a mega group of nearly 8000 tribal women and “Danteshwari Sena” of about 2350 tribal women have been formed to ensure that each and every HH has a safe toilet and used by everyone.

• Role of School Children: School children were introduced into the campaign by awaiting them on effects of OD and why and how to end it. These children contributed through rallies and cultural programs all across the district.

• Nigrani Samitis (Vigilance committees): Each GP now has a community vigilance team which ensures that no one defecates in the open and the infant’s excreta is also safely disposed by the guardians. Children are also part of such teams which helps these communities sustain their ODF environment.

Ensuring sustainability

It was extremely challenging to implement CLTS in such a hard to reach and inaccessible regions of the tribal territory. However, smart planning and strategic execution ensured one of the best examples of CLTS implementation in Dantewada. While the tribal communities have become ODF in a relatively short span of time, concerns around the sustainability of their ODF status still persist. Past experiences from many other places show that many communities tend to slip back to open defecation, if sustainable collective behavior change has not taken place post ODF declaration. As the community movement slowed down, people stopped using toilets and again started defecating in open. Learning from those experiences, DSC and UNICEF experts designed some tools to ensure sustainability in newly covered areas.

Early morning follow-up using Gandhigiri i.e a Gandhian method of polite and firm persuasion was introduced within ODF communities and villages, during which few triggered community members including children formed groups to move around the habitation and emphasize on toilet usage and inform people on how to safely dispose infant excreta. DSC and other administrative officers regularly conducted community meetings and programs to create awareness among the people about the benefits of ending open defecation and also triggering them to keep the environment clean. Orientation programs at different levels are also being conducted to mobilize the communities towards sustaining ODF environment. Film shows, based on sanitation, are also being organized in villages and schools as reinforcing communication tools. Many communities, through community resolutions, have decided to impose fines on the people defecating in the open. DSC also visits villages and conducts a voting session locally termed as “Gupt Matdaan” through which people are asked to secretly give their observation whether or not all the community members are using toilets and not defecating in the open.

Each and every toilet is inspected by the DSC to ensure if it is built as per the standards of twin leech pit. If there is some technical error, it is repaired and made functional. Communication tools encouraging the people to talk about toilets and ODF campaign are used at the maximum possible public locations. All these steps are having good and sustainable results in transforming the behaviour. Natural leaders and other community motivators are continuously engaged in social communication and triggering the people for toilet usage. Though this transformation is still in its nascent stage, the enthusiasm and determination of the communities makes it look like a sustainable popular movement.

Do toilets really benefit them?

Post ODF, a survey was carried out in different habitations of the district to understand the feedback and experience of these people after having and using toilets at their dwellings. A total of 102 respondents were asked to prioritize different benefits, mentioned below, of having toilets as per their experience and priorities.

All respondents agreed to these 7 benefits resulting from toilet usage and based on their individual experiences they were asked to prioritize these benefits. On processing the data thus collected, we found out that 58 percent respondents agreed that the most important benefit of toilet usage is that it prevents faecal oral transmission. 20 percent feel that toilet usage is hygienic in first place. Another 8 percent prioritized time and
7 percent opted safety as primary benefit. Privacy and convenience were opted by 4 and 3 percent respondents respectively whereas 1 percent felt that dignity was the most important benefit of toilet usage.

![Figure 1. Benefits of toilet usage based on individual experience and priorities](source: Survey done on 102 habitants of Dantewada district (post ODF))

**Learning and conclusion**
This CLTS intervention in Dantewada district and the resultant experience underlines the following learning:
(i) CLTS is a powerful method for creating popular movements for creating ODF communities in hard to reach remote tribal communities; (ii) A critical awareness of the damaging consequences of OD and perceived importance of toilet usage have been the most potent factors for ensuring the long term sustainability of ODF outcomes in tribal communities in this region; (iii) An informed understanding of the cultures, practices, beliefs and lifestyles of tribal communities is the key to effective community triggering leading to sustainable ODF results on the ground; (iv) effective community triggering with the help of innovative and locally applicable tools brought sustainable behaviour change among the tribal communities in Dantewada district.

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