

INSIGHT SERIES 11 - NEW DELHI

Synthesis Document: Role of Youth in Sanitation

The XI in the series of Insights dialogue, organized by the Indian Sanitation Coalition, IRC, and TARU Leading Edge was held on the 26th of April, 2019 in New Delhi. This discussion addressed the critical role of youth as a key stakeholder in ensuring sanitation services for all.



Six out of ten people around the world do not have access to safely managed sanitation services¹. It is a well-known fact that it is the marginalized sections of the society that are most affected in this regard, and as a consequence most vulnerable to poverty and poor health. The Sustainable Development Goal 6 on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all is particularly aimed towards complete inclusivity by leaving no one behind.

The 2030 agenda requires engagement of all sections of society, particularly the youth - who have an important role to play in the process.

The active participation of youth is central to achieving sustainable, inclusive and stable societies and addressing the challenges therein. As leaders of tomorrow, they are both, key recipients as well as drivers of development. They provide opportunities in the present to develop skills for the future. In sanitation, youth present a vital opportunity to forge a lucid narrative of building a sustainable ecosystem. Their mobility and accessibility can ensure that communication with and to those left behind is always maintained.

DIALOGUE ON THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN SANITATION

India Sanitation Coalition, IRC and Taru Leading Edge organized the eleventh 'Insights' session on 26th April

2019 in New Delhi. The panelists included Aayush Baid from The Global Education & Leadership Foundation, Afsal Muttikkal from Genrobotics, Amit Arora from Doordarshan, Gurukirrat Sachdeva from Youth Ki Awaaz, and Ruchika Shiva from IRC. The discussion highlighted the critical role of youth in steering towards developmental goals. The panelists deliberated over the various capacities in which the youth are contributing to the sanitation drive in the country.

NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

The National Youth Policy (2014) of India defines youth as comprising of individuals between the age of 15 and 29 years. With nearly one-third of its total population falling in the category of youth, India is a young country². In this context, India has a relative advantage at present over other countries. This relative advantage, also known as the demographic dividend, however, needs to be harnessed, motivated and adequately skilled to bring gains to the country. The National Youth Policy (2014), thus, proposes to substantially empower the youth so as to enable them to achieve their full potential, and through them strengthen India.

OBJECTIVES OF NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

The National Youth Policy lists down five objectives and they are as following:

- i) Create a productive workforce that can make a sustainable contribution to India's economic development
- ii) Develop a strong and healthy generation equipped to take on future challenges
- iii) Instill social values and promote community service to build national ownership
- iv) Facilitate participation and civic engagement at all levels of governance
- v) Support youth at risk and create equitable opportunity for all disadvantaged and marginalized youth

YOUTH AS KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The youth are an important stakeholder in the context of sanitation. A sustainable sanitation ecosystem is necessary to ensure a strong and healthy population. Sanitation by itself offers multiple avenues of engagement for youth in terms of entrepreneurship, community engagement and promotion of social justice. Several not-for-profit organizations over the years have engaged youth in promoting safe sanitation in multiple capacities.

The Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), in the same vein, has made available multiple avenues for the youth's involvement in the provision of sustainable sanitation services. SBM, in terms of its scale and reach, is a sanitation campaign unlike any other in the country. While it is the flagship programme of the central government, it has drawn interest and involvement of all parts of the society. SBM, thus, essentially is a people-led movement.

It has facilitated the robustness and growth of the WASH sector in the country, which has led to the launch of several initiatives (introduced by NGOs, foundations, the corporate sector, and others) towards sustainable sanitation.

ENGAGING YOUTH IN SANITATION THROUGH SBM

In terms of engaging the youth, there have been some definite ways in which SBM has facilitated the process. SBM has drawn the young to partake in sanitation campaigns as volunteers. The most notable in this regard are the Swachhagrahis or the foot soldiers of SBM. They play the vital role of motivators - influencing behaviour change in sanitation practices in rural India. According to the Ministry of Drinking Water and Supply, there are 606,521 (284,768 volunteers and 321,582 paid) Swachhagrahis in the country³. The revised Swachhagrahi guidelines 2018⁴, highlight their role as a key contributing factor in achieving and sustaining open defecation free (ODF) status. The Swachhagrahi's activities, as defined in the guidelines, commence from planning, through implementation to ensuring sustainability. From triggering behaviour change to facilitating toilet construction and to sustaining behaviour change, Swachhagrahis are involved in all activities related to sanitation promotion at the village level.

Village youth organizations and schemes such as the National Service Scheme (NSS) and Nehru Yuvak Kendra have also been closely involved in grassroots level behaviour change programmes. School children as sanitation ambassadors have also contributed as early adopters and promoters of good sanitation practices.

Further, SBM has led to the creation of job opportunities for young WASH enthusiasts. It is important to mention in this context the Zilla Swachh Bharat Preraks (ZSBP) - the young professionals providing technical and managerial support for planning, implementation, and monitoring of SBM in the district, particularly towards achieving ODF status. Also referred to as the sanitation warriors, the ZSBP are expected to "motivate communities to build toilets, help district officials in data analytics, track payments of government incentives, take pictures of constructed toilets and in short, keep the wheels of SBM rolling at top speed."⁵

Additionally, the youth have made significant contributions as entrepreneurs in the sanitation movement. It is important to mention the work of Genrobotic Innovations (GI) in this regard. GI is a social enterprise formed by young engineers, with the aim to provide robotic solutions to pressing social issues. One of their most important innovations is the 'Bandicoot' - a semi-robotic device with a human-controlled interface to clean manholes. Bandicoot prevents manual scavenging by offering an alternate solution to manhole cleaning.

Identifying itself as a social enterprise, GI goes beyond providing a technological solution to the challenging work of manual scavengers. It upskills them by providing them the training to operate the device, while simultaneously works on their rehabilitation. GI at present works with 14 urban local bodies, both within and outside India.

IMPACT OF YOUTH IN SANITATION

The discussion illustrated SBM's significant contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the National Youth Policy 2014. Sanitation by itself has a positive impact on health, thereby aiding the growth of a healthy workforce in the country. With the creation of official roles like Swachhagrahis and ZSBP, SBM has facilitated youth participation in community engagement, and the promotion of social values and a healthy lifestyle. Further, by championing sanitation, SBM has enabled a thriving environment for young innovators and entrepreneurs to find solutions for the persistent challenges in the sector. SBM demonstrates that engaging youth - their energy, innovation, creativity, and ability to harness technology - can contribute positively to sanitation and make a critical impact in catalyzing change.

To continuously facilitate this process, the youth need to be aware as well as aspire to bring about change. According to Gurkirrat Sachdeva of Youth Ki Awaaz, "the youth need to be equipped with the right information to inspire action and exercise citizenship". They need to be cognizant of the issues of equity and equality with respect to access to sanitation. At the same time, they need to be aware of the sanitation value chain – what happens to the toilet waste, is it safely collected, emptied, transported, treated or disposed of? They also need to be aware of their rights and minimum service level standards mentioned in official documents or promised by leaders.

Technology has the potential to contribute positively in this regard. According to Ayush Baid of the Global Education and Leadership Foundation, technology has facilitated connection and communication with the rest of the world, fostering the growth of a generation of millennials that is more empathetic and believes in an equitable world. Technology has, additionally, enabled them to amplify their voice as well as hold the leaders accountable for the promises made. For instance, encouraged by the content shared on the web-based media platform - Youth Ki Awaaz- the community members carried out an analysis of election manifestos on the topic of sanitation.

In addition to technology, there is a need for inclusion of such topics in school textbooks for awareness generation on sanitation. Further, there is a need for platforms that facilitate interaction among youth from diverse backgrounds as well as with experts, to facilitate cross-fertilization of ideas.

CONCLUSION

The youth are a key stakeholder in building a sustainable sanitation ecosystem in the country. They are driven, agile and can influence behaviour change at the grassroots level. Critical to reaping this potential is that the youth actively engage in the process of sanitation provision. For this, it is important that platforms are made available for their engagement. SBM has been instrumental in giving momentum to youth engagement in sanitation in multiple capacities - from planning, implementation, to monitoring and sustaining. It is, however, equally important that the youth recognize their responsibility and aspire to bring about change. Critical to this process is that the youth are aware of the existing challenges and inequities in the society, and able to hold leaders accountable.

[1] United Nation's World Water Development Report 2019

[2] Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation Government of India. Youth in India, 2017. Last accessed on 18th May 2019. http://mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Youth_in_India-2017.pdf

[3] Ministry of Drinking Water and Supply. Last accessed on 18th May 2019. https://sbm.gov.in/sbmreport/Report/Panchayat/SBM_SwachhagrahiDetails.aspx

[4] Ministry of Drinking Water and Supply, Revised Swachhagrahi guidelines 2018. Last accessed on 18th May 2019. https://mdws.gov.in/sites/default/files/Swachhagrahi_Guidelines_2018.pdf

[5] Ministry of Drinking Water and Supply, Zila Swachh Bharat Preraks - India Sanitation Warriors. Last accessed on 18th May 2019. https://mdws.gov.in/sites/default/files/ZSBP_India%27s_Sanitation_Warriors.pdf

For more information on the "Insights" knowledge series visit the India Sanitation Coalition [website](#).

This document is a product of the Insights Series; developed by IRC, India Sanitation Coalition and Taru Leading Edge.

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