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Title : How a block in UP got toilet trained and turned swachh

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It's crack of dawn. A band of children at Mawaiya village of Shikhar block meet at the square. They're Bal Nigrani Samiti members. Quietly, they spread out and hide in the trees, behind bushes, in abandoned houses. The moment they spot anyone headed for the fields to defecate, they blow whistles, make a din driving them away.

The efforts of these children and committed villagers have worked. Today, Shikhar block of UP's Mirzapur district is the state's first to be declared open defecation free (ODF).

For a state where only 25% people on an average use a toilet, this is an achievement, says Amit Kumar Singh, district chief development officer. "It's heartening, the villagers achieved this milestone on their own." Shikhar has a population of 90,295; 35 gram panchayats and 67 revenue villages.

The block was put through a process called "triggering", part of the community-led total sanitation (CLTS) programme, one the district administration adopted motivating villagers to use toilets. In five months, Shikhar got 8,997 toilets.

THE GENESIS

The beginning was innocuous, Singh recalls. "Some villagers approached us with a problem -neighbours were defecating in each other's fields, leading to frayed tempers. When people defecated in spinach fields, the crop got dirty and couldn't be sold," he says. This encouraged Singh to rope in the local Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) team, the panchayat department and implement CLTS in one block. With Unicef help three blocks along the Ganga were identified -Kon, Shikhar and Majhawan. Finally, Shikhar was chosen.

"I wanted CLTS specialists, so NGO FINISH was brought in," adds Singh. The brief was sharp: Train three batches of the village's 'natural leaders' to motivate and implement the change. A nodal officer in each gram panchayat established ties with villagers to spread awareness.

THE CHANGE

"People wanted the change," says Singh. First, awareness was created among the "natural leaders" - people who'd persuade others to change. They were told about the diseases open defecation causes. They persuaded people to build toilets or use existing ones. A demonstration of how open defecation endangers lives shook up the villagers. Bhijen Singh, Basarhatpur village Pradhan, recalls: "The NGO worker gathered villagers near the defecation ground. He had a bottle of water, which he poured in a glass. He plucked a strand of hair from his head and touched it to an excreta heap. He dipped the hair in the glass of water and asked villagers to drink. Everyone cringed."

"The man explained: Flies sit on excreta, then on our food and water, contaminating everything," Arvind Singh, pradhan, Mediya village, joins in.

Subsequently, the villagers mapped where toilets could be built, how far they'd be from homes and water sources, location of toilets in the Harijan and Muslim enclaves.

MONITORING CHANGE

The funds for the toilet construction under Swachh Bharat Mission is dependent on the household's eligibility. For individual household latrines in rural areas, Rs 9,000 and Rs 3,000 for each toilet is given by the Centre and

state respectively to BPL households and identified APL households.

Other APL households are motivated to build toilets with their own funds or by taking loans from self-help groups, banks, cooperatives etc.

Nigrani Samitis were formed to monitor progress. “These keep an eye on those insisting on going to the fields,” says Rupesh Kumar Singh of Mawaiya village. All Shikhar villages have Bal, Purush and Mahila Samitis discouraging people from open defecation.

The local administration called the campaign “Nirmal Shikhar”, set up a WhatsApp group of officials and samiti members. “The samiti encourages people resisting change to cover excreta with soil.

Those who don't are garlanded and warned their pictures will be put on WhatsApp,” says Singh.

THE IMPACT

The results are discernible -this summer there's been no diarrhea case at Mediya.

There are fewer flies. It's not been easy, Rupesh says. “Some women insist going to the field is important; it's the only time they venture out,” says the pradhan. But such cases are getting fewer. By August, UP's SBM hopes to turn all 110 villages along the Ganga ODF.



SHAME WORKS



Kids up a tree blow the whistle on offenders: the idea to shame the villager. With similar women's and men's groups, this has succeeded in 'converting' resisters to using toilets. If the shaming too fails, the offender's name is put on a small flag placed on a mound of faeces. Some villages threatened to hold back ration but did not take the extreme step

Photo: Sanjay Gupta

WRITING ON THE WALL



Detailed graffiti explaining hygiene, sanitation points in Mawaiya village. Awareness drives have persuaded people to turn Swachh

