Improving Consumer Voices and Accountability
Evidence from Odisha SBM-G Programme

✍ Introduction

While sanitation is considered as an important aspect of a human life process which influences the overall health and development, the actual practice in India remains suboptimal. In this line every household ought to be provided with access to toilet facilities. At the same time whenever such services are provided, it should be aligned with the needs of a beneficiary's perception and transparent voice. In such conditionalities, accountability plays a major role for success. Against this backdrop, Public Affairs Centre carried a study-cum-intervention on the 'Swachh Bharat Mission- Gramin (SBM-G)-the Indian National Programme, in terms of understanding consumer voice and accountability. It focused on the rural population of Odisha state through a 3-year long research project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

The study had two main objectives. The first one aimed at stimulating the demand for creating platforms for consumers to voice/demand the need for toilets that lead to an increase in applications for building household toilets and usage of toilets. The second was to augment the supply by assessing and understanding provider constraints to advocate improvement in systems for enhanced responsiveness (related to funds, grievance redressal).

Social Accountability Tools (SAT) were employed to understand problems at grassroot levels which guided the PAC research team to engage with the community (users) so as to 'close the loop'. The Citizen Report Card(CRC) was employed to collect user and provider feedback at the beginning and at the end of the project. Around 2600 households who constructed toilets under the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA)/SBM (G) and 400 service providers were surveyed from 6 districts of Odisha state. To understand discrepancies in internal fund flows and functional responsibilities within the system, CRC+ exercises were undertaken. Checklists were used to gather information and were then analysed using qualitative method. To engage with communities and to develop ethnographic understanding the Community Score Card (CSC) was used and this helped to create platforms for communities and providers to work together. This helped improve the existing IEC (Information, Education and Communication) programme by innovating a new tool called 'Community Led Media Mix (CLMM)' by creating several wall paints and leaflets on various aspects of toilet construction and usage.
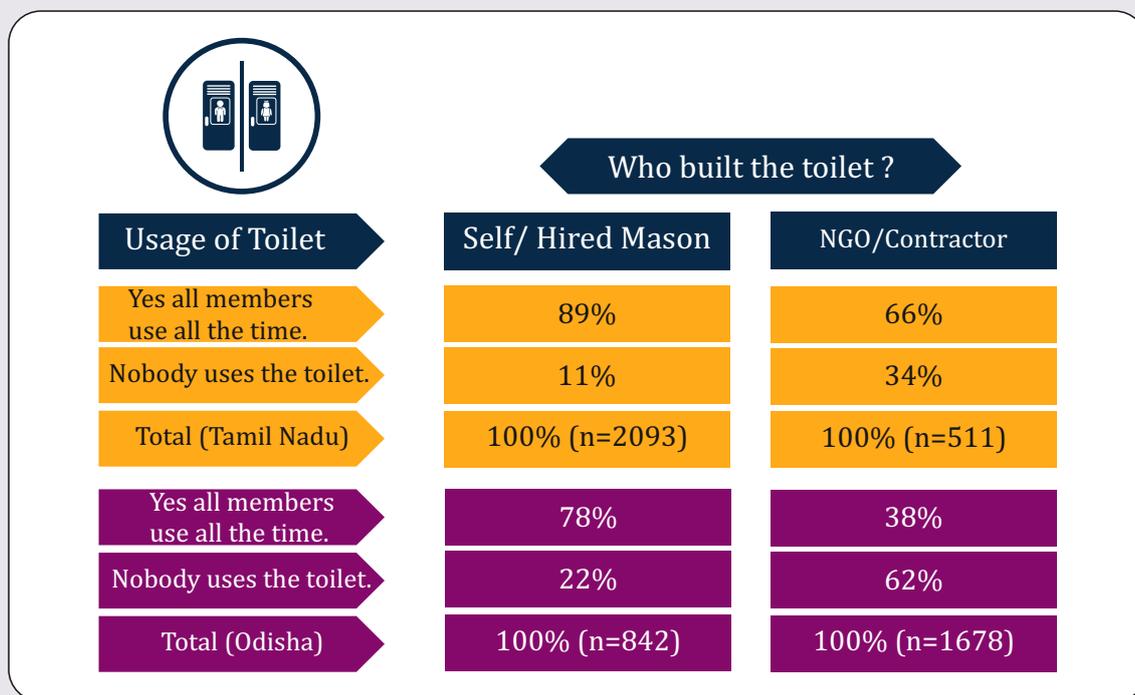
🔍 Key Findings

Some of the most important finding of the project were:

- Toilets were used since the efforts of the end-users (public) were involved in the project
- Communicating information and access to information emerged as an urgent need for beneficiaries
- Information on maintenance and usage of toilets must be part of the programme
- Water facility should be ensured for toilet usage at all times as it remains the main reason for no usage
- Social exclusion, poor transparency and irregularity (bribe) some other important issues that hampers the utilisation of services
- There were case of exclusion of certain caste groups and minority population in selection and provision of services

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- Extra payment at different stages of toilet construction by the beneficiaries too emerged as a discouraging factor that warrants urgent intervention.

The image below shows how the usage of toilet is largely associated with self-construction of the same.

Usage of Toilet	Self/ Hired Mason	NGO/Contractor
Who built the toilet ?		
Yes all members use all the time.	89%	66%
Nobody uses the toilet.	11%	34%
Total (Tamil Nadu)	100% (n=2093)	100% (n=511)
Yes all members use all the time.	78%	38%
Nobody uses the toilet.	22%	62%
Total (Odisha)	100% (n=842)	100% (n=1678)

Implications vs Recommendations

- As self-built toilets are used more, there is a need to ensure that beneficiaries are given appropriate options and support

- Awareness on different aspects of toilet construction and usage should be provided to grass-root level volunteers (sometimes called Swacchata Doot) using appropriate communication materials (leaflets, wall paints, meetings etc.). At the same time RSM (Rural Sanitary Mart) should provide easy access to beneficiaries to procure the materials needed for constructing toilets

- Maintenance and repair of toilets is more useful in terms of uninterrupted usage without which the aim of the SBM-G programme to maintain ODF (Open Defecation Free) cannot be achieved

- Access to water for toilet usage should be provided both in terms of source and storage facility

- Massive awareness and monitoring for avoiding social exclusion, poor transparency and irregularity (bribe) need to be put in place by both official as well as social level audits mechanism.

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