

Bhageerath

Challenge: Facilitating awareness and proactive behavior towards improving community sanitation, including elimination of open defecation

Solution: Empower villagers to work together to identify and solve their own sanitation challenges

Benefits: Healthier living situations and community ownership and awareness of sanitation

About Bhageerath

Bhageerath is an NGO, based in Dharwad, Bangalore, Mysore and Belgaum, that addresses issues of water, sanitation, health, hygiene and environmental protection. In 2008, Bhageerath-Dharwad began implementing the Deshpande Foundation funded program, "Creating Model Gram Panchayats for Total Sanitation." The project uses community led total sanitation (CLTS) methods to address sanitation problems in ten Dharwad gram panchayats (GPs). This case study highlights Bhageerath's work and the challenges the organization faces as it scales the program from three to eight GPs over the next year.

The Situation

Bhageerath uses community led total sanitation (CLTS) as a method to address sanitation issues in the Sandbox. CLTS involves facilitating communities to come together and recognize the negative effects of open defecation (OD) and then work towards eliminating it. CLTS activities are community-specific but some examples include public education campaigns, banning OD, and building latrines.

Since its introduction to India in 2004, CLTS has had limited success due to the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), a government program whose stipends for toilet construction are more appealing to villagers than CLTS's concentration on village-generated resources. CLTS has seen most of its success in India in the states of Maharashtra, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh.

The Challenge

Following are several of the challenges faced by Bhageerath:

- *Women's involvement:* Women often do not attend IEC activities, and when they do, rarely participate, even when attendance is restricted to women only. Moreover, many women do not participate in household financial decision-making, and therefore cannot advocate for toilet construction. Bhageerath views women as crucial to lasting change. How can
 - Q). How can Bhageerath ensure women's active participation and involvement in sanitation and hygiene programming, and in household sanitation decision-making?
- *Eliminating the practice of OD among the elderly:* Anecdotally, the elderly are the largest demographic of OD practitioners despite comprising just 5-10%

of the population. Many people claim that OD is so deeply ingrained among the elderly that the issue is not worth addressing. Even the government of India awards the Nirmal Gram Puraskar to villages whose elders still practice OD.

- Q). What can Bhageerath do to convince the elderly to stop open defecation? Or, should Bhageerath follow the government's lead and assume that resources used to target the elderly would be better used elsewhere?
- *Promoting eco-sanitation toilets among agriculturalists:* Bhageerath has constructed five ecosan toilets to generate interest, conducted training programs on the benefits of ecosan toilets, and offered an INR 7,500 stipend to offset construction costs to incentivize villagers. But farmers still will not build them.
 - How can Bhageerath make the ecosan toilet more appealing to agriculturalists?
- *Partnering with the government:* The governments of India and Karnataka are entering villages through rural development projects, some of which address Bhageerath's target issues. People are much more trusting of and receptive to the government than they are to NGOs. However, the government's projects often fall short; they don't set realistic goals, are not well planned or executed, and don't achieve sustainable results. These are all things Bhageerath strives to attain, yet doesn't always accomplish because of villagers' skepticism. Bhageerath's work could benefit from the presence of powerful government figures, while the government's work could benefit from Bhageerath's methodology.
 - Q). How can Bhageerath forge a partnership with the government in which Bhageerath and the government exchange these strengths, and change the way the government programs in water, sanitation, and hygiene, to achieve the ultimate goal of total sanitation?

The Solution

Bhageerath's approach is rooted in empowering villagers to identify and solve their own sanitation problems. Bhageerath's main responsibilities are to work with the local government, identify qualified and dedicated village facilitators, and provide technical support for toilet construction and information, education, and communication (IEC) activities. Thus, in the spirit of true CLTS, most of the resources and motivation come from the villagers themselves. This ensures a sustainable approach to total sanitation. Aside from the positive health outcomes, people are also motivated by the Nirmal Gram Puraskar (Clean Village Prize), a cash award given by the government of India to GPs that are 100% OD free.

Bhageerath's goals are:

- 100% elimination of open defecation
- Facilitate all households and schools in accessing adequate sanitation facilities;

- Raise awareness and change behavior among villagers regarding proper hygiene and sanitation practices at the household and community levels; and
- Explore recovering the resource value out of waste generated in villages at the household and community levels.

Below are the steps Bhageerath takes to achieve total sanitation:

1. Leverage local government: Partner with Dharwad Zilla Panchayat to select GPs based on soil quality, population, and program support. Choose GPs with low quality black cotton soil; sparsely, moderately, and overpopulated villages; and both GPs who are supportive or unsupportive. The diversity in population and level of support is important to compare results, and make programmatic alterations before scaling to other villages.
2. Establish a relationship with the village: Choose villagers to conduct baseline sanitation surveys of every village household. The most important findings were that 10-15% of Shivalli and Mangundi GP households had sanitation facilities, 80% of Gumgol GP households had sanitation facilities but less than 50% used them, and only 5% of villagers used soap when washing their hands. Village facilitators are hired to coordinate, follow-up, record, and assist with activities, construction, and funding.
3. Conduct IEC activities: Commence IEC work, covering health risks, stigma, water treatment, and improved hygiene, with particular focus on women and children. Bhageerath also conducts targeted outreach and campaigns, using village facilitators and GP members to gain trust.
4. Construct toilets: Connect villagers with government subsidies for toilets and work with villagers to build toilets. To facilitate toilet construction, Bhageerath provides technical support and established Rural Sanitation Marts (RSMs) in Shivalli and Mangundi GPs. They also introduce the concept of ecosan toilets.

The Results

One of Bhageerath's major achievements, thanks to the help of village facilitators, was an increase in hand washing with soap from 5% to 50%. Despite this new approach, however, Bhageerath still faced difficulty reaching certain populations, particularly women and the elderly.

Thus far, villagers have constructed 290 household toilets and 1 community toilet. 100% of these toilets are being used. Both Shivalli and Gumgol GPs have received the Nirmal Gram Puraskar.

Bhageerath has not seen great success to date with ecosan toilets. Though they have the additional benefits of requiring no water or chemicals and emitting no odor, there are two major drawbacks. The first is that one unit is a costly INR 15,000. The second is that ecosan toilets are difficult to introduce to a population just getting used to traditional toilets. That said, Bhageerath has paid for and installed five

model ecosan units to generate interest, but still faces problem introducing the model since it is so unique.