

## A step towards ending Manual Scavenging in Budaun

### Genesis:

The problem - open defecation within houses (dry latrines) is a root cause that impinges on the health and well being of the community. People who clean those toilets by removing and carrying human excreta are manual scavengers. Though banned under law, there still exist dry latrines and practice of manual scavenging in many parts of the country. There were around 50 thousand dry latrines in the rural areas of district Badaun. Epidemics such as diarrhea etc. are common in the district. The district has very high Infant Mortality Rate of 110 (116 in Rural and 120 for Rural Females). In year 2009 the district had third highest cases of wild polio viruses in India, most of those in the villages having dry latrines. Of the 66 High Risk Blocks identified by NPSP- WHO and UNICEF in Uttar Pradesh for Polio Eradication, 16 development Blocks are in Badaun District (there are a total of 18 development Blocks in district!). Pervasive dry latrines were identified as primary reasons for all these. Most of the high risk areas are the ones having dry latrines.



The dry latrines affect society in three major ways. **Firstly**, it affects users of the dry latrines by exposing them to all types of health hazards, much worse than those caused by open field defecation, especially women and children who are in the house for most of the times in the midst of stinking environment and flies, exacerbated further by delay in

cleanliness. From time immemorial they had the history of using the dry latrines in their houses where excreta was laid open till the time manual scavenger lady employed for cleaning the latrine comes and cleans, sometimes this period may extend to two or three days as well. Many times delay in cleaning prevents women, who cannot go for open defecation, from defecating causing various other health problems. **Secondly**, there are the workers (manual scavengers) who have been assigned with the 'responsibility' to clean the human excreta by hands and carry it on head to dumping site. Further, manual scavenging is done by one of the scheduled castes known as Balmiki community. In rural India it is women who constitute the majority among

manual scavengers. This is one of the worst known employments in human history and memory that directly hits at the dignity of individuals carrying on manual scavenging. The entire family of Manual Scavengers has to go through the dilemma of lifelong self esteem, experience physical and social segregation. **Thirdly**, it affects people living in the vicinity of houses having dry latrines, because they are also exposed to all types of health hazards. The situation was so bad that many outsiders used to report nausea and sickness after visiting villages having large number of dry latrines. Dry latrine and consequent manual scavenging constitute a problem that transgresses into the domains of caste and gender, health and occupation, human dignity and freedom, and human rights and social justice.

Health facilities in Badaun are better as compared to many other districts of UP. Income levels are also reasonable. Hence there was consensus that reason for one of the poorest health indicators could be attributed to poor sanitation conditions. But the real problem in the field of sanitation was identified by the district administration during the field visit of the District Magistrate Mr. Amit Gupta to the village Ramzanpur, block Qadar Chowk during a health and sanitation meeting in the month of July. It was shocking to see the number of flies and the disgusting odor that was felt on entering the village. While making an inspection of the lanes of the village, what could be observed were the vents of the dry latrines opening on the roads and the excreta from many vents flowing into the drains and even onto the roads of the village. On further enquiry it was told that nearly 700-1000 such latrines existed in the village making it nearly 70% of the total households in the village. After the visit a meeting of the district officials was called and they were asked to take a resolution to end these dry latrines from the district. Generally the government machinery is known for its incapacity and insensitivity, so it was decided to sensitize the district officials regarding the problem and to get them engaged in this campaign. In the sensitization meeting, DPRO Mr. Chaudhary initiated his address by asking if any one of those present there would like to handle the excreta of another person for which he or she would be paid 5000 rupees. None among the present officials responded to it. Mr. Chaudhary said that while walking on the road if the human excreta got on our feet, we tried to get it off by rubbing against the grass and then by water and finally after reaching back home we tried to wash it thrice so that not even the smallest particle was left over. He added, the excreta once discarded, which we didn't want to look back at, was handled by a human being like us only and that too merely for a single bread. He asked the audience if they thought it was acceptable. The answer came in one voice that this was not acceptable and

that they would do all that could be done to abolish this cruel practice. This was the initiation of a new program in Budaun district. Thus in July 2010 under the leadership of District Magistrate, a consensus was generated in district administration that a drive, on mission mode, needs to be undertaken to eradicate 50 thousand odd dry toilets and rehabilitate around 2000 manual scavengers and to give a dignified life to their families.

### Concept:

Manual Scavengers are those who are engaged in the removal of excreta manually for their livelihood. This system of manual scavenging is particularly established in the western districts of Uttar Pradesh. Budaun district is one among the districts where till date more than 2000 families are doing the job of manual scavenging for making the both ends meet.

To end this evil practice of Manual Scavenging needs a lot to be done before initiating the program. This is not as simple as to stop some practice with the fear of the law. There were three critical components under this program, namely (a) The Dry Latrine User (b) The Manual Scavenger and (c) The District Administration. To make the process move it was essential to have all the three components motivated and brought on the same level of thinking and of mutual trust and benefit.



### Planning:

The reasons that attribute to the backwardness of Budaun are twofold one being Education and the other Sanitation. The main cause of pollution in the rural areas is the dry latrines spread across the length and breadth of the village and are proving a contributor to the spread of infectious diseases. The planning began with assessment of the problem i.e identifying how big the problem is. The District Magistrate ordered the survey of all villages where Manual Scavenging is in practice. The initial survey in the district revealed more than 15000 dry latrines in the 73 Gram panchayats. While it was assessed that there could be more than 50- 60 thousand dry latrines in the entire district. So on the one hand the district had nearly 50- 60 thousand families using dry latrines and on the other there were the Manual Scavengers those too more than 2000 families that were entirely based on this profession. And

thus, the task was to convince both the dry latrine users and the Manual Scavengers.

For the success of the program it was essential to have both the groups at the same platform and get them ready to take active participation. When talks were initiated with the Manual Scavengers three problems of importance came to the fore front. The first problem was of the section that had been into this profession of manual scavenging by birth and this had been their ancestral profession. They considered it as their profession and that is the only way they can earn their livelihood. They did not see any taboo or any social evil attached to this work. The second section was of the people who wanted to get rid of this work but due to lack of any other employment opportunity they were forced to take this work. The third section was that wanted to get rid of this socially backward work but the people in their villages who are having the dry latrines restricted them to adopt any other work and continue with this. The district administration thoroughly studied the angles associated with this program and then decided to take over the category of manual scavengers who do not have any other employment opportunity. The administration then devised a comprehensive strategy to rehabilitate this section of society. It was decided to give the benefit of the different schemes of government to the manual scavengers so that the dependence on this work is mitigated. The District Supply Officer was asked to provide the Manual Scavengers who are ready to forego their work with BPL and Antyodaya cards. The manual scavengers whose children are studying were to be provided by the special scholarship and those who were eligible for any of the pension schemes were to be provided by it. A few of the workers could be provided with the Mahamaya Awas and the Indira Awas. The job cards were to be made for the manual scavenger's family and in order to provide immediate relief new works were started to give employment to them under MNREGA. This would result in helping the manual scavengers to take decision to leave the work who in absence of all these social security measures were finding it difficult to leave the work.

The families using the dry latrines were identified and during the survey itself it was known that a majority of the families were having a super structure in their dry latrines. It was also known that this super structure could be used in the pour flush design too and that this would not take more than two days to convert a single latrine. As regarding the cost it was found that with a super structure already in place not more than 1600 rupees would be needed for the conversion. And thus began a mega conversion drive. A little support of Rs 1500 to the families which were really in distress and needed badly could be provided from the funds that were lying unused in the accounts of the Gram

Panchayats for past many years. These funds were to be brought back at the district and then were diverted to the villages where needed.

### **Execution:**

Generally the government machinery is known for its incapacity and its rampant corruption but Mr. Gupta asked the District Panchayat Raj Officer Mr. R.S. Chaudhry to sensitize the district officials and to get them engaged in this work which Mr. Chaudhry did efficiently. In the sensitization meeting Mr. Chaudhry initiated his address by asking a question if any one of those present here would like to handle the excreta of other person and for that he or she can be paid 5000 rupees. None among the present officials responded back to it. Mr. Chaudhry said that while walking on the road if the human excreta gets on our feet, we try to get it off by rubbing against the grass and then by water and finally after reaching back home we try to wash it thrice so that not even a smallest particle is left over. He added, the excreta once discarded, we don't want to look back is handled by the human being like us only and that too merely for a single bread. He asked the audience if they consider this is right the answer came in one voice that this is not right and they will do all that can be done to abolish this cruel practice. This was the initiation of a new program in Budaun district.

The district Magistrate ordered the DPRO to identify for the first phase of conversion drive the villages having the largest number of dry latrines and according to the need the required funds shall be transferred to the respective Gram Panchayats. Now came the question of resources. In the first phase there were more than 16000 dry latrines to be converted in 73 identified villages and at the district level there was fund only adequate enough to support conversion of 6000 toilets. Taking note of the previous funds transferred to the gram panchayats that were lying unused, were transferred back to the district and it was decided to provide funds to those gram panchayats here conversion drive has to take place. Within a month 15 million rupees were brought back and now the district had enough amount to take the conversion drive in full swing. On one hand where the manual scavengers were getting rid of this menial job the villagers at the same time were getting help to control the deadly diseases and an overall clean environment in the district. Within a short span of two months 14000 dry latrines were converted to pour flush ones and 51 villages were made completely free of dry latrines menace. As much as 566 families associated with the work of manual scavenging were rehabilitated. A fact worth mentioning is that where as in some villages there was a progress of as little as 6 and 9 toilets in two months there were villages like sakri jungle,

Ramzanpur, Shekhupur and Kheri where despite the heavy rain 632, 718, 565 and 470 toilets were constructed respectively. Till November last 21,000 dry latrines were converted to pour flush latrines and that too with community involvement. Not even a single family that converted had been forced by the district officials to do so.

The second section that was made to continue this profession was tried to provide support by the administrative tactics. The District Magistrate ordered all SDMs that if any person is found restricting any manual scavenger from leaving this job shall be dealt with very strictly within the existing provisions of law. If necessary they shall be booked under the criminal acts and further actions to be taken accordingly. The clear message from the DM's desk demoralized any such attempt to restrict the manual scavengers from leaving their jobs. The third section that wanted to remain associated with this profession by their own will was difficult to handle. But as the saying goes where there is a will there is a way. One day a president of Balmiki Sena Mr. Mukesh came to The DPRO for an issue with the Sanitation worker. The DPRO responded that he will certainly look into the matter but only if the Balmiki Sena supports this program. Mr. Mukesh was more than happy to work for the betterment of their own community. He also organized the influential people from their community Mr. Kalicharan being an important one among them and went along with this program. For the program the vehicle and the posters were provided by the District Panchayat Raj Office. The poster named Naya Savera brought a new morning as its name meant to many villages. They even threatened that they would totally boycott the family that will still be engaged in manual scavenging and that they will not get into matrimonial relationship with any such family and this brought a real change. They also tried to boost the lost confidence among the manual scavengers. They also told that they are the descendents of Maharishi Balmiki who has the credit of writing the Ramayana. This helped in changing the mind of people who considered this work as the only means of earning the bread. They also compared the status of manual scavengers in the way that nobody cares or maintains a distance with a beggar but everyone tries to get away from the manual scavenger and this is only because of the work they are doing. These words created a lasting impression on the minds of the manual scavengers and motivated them to forego this menial job.

For the successful implementation of the program it was essential to have a set of workers matching the government structure. For this at the Block level and at Village level the motivators were appointed. Usually there is a delayed payment to the motivators and thus it makes them lenient towards the cause. So in order to make payments available for the village motivators an amount

matching to their honorarium was transferred to the accounts and the Village Secretary and the Gram Pradhan were told to pay the amount instantly to the motivators. Payments to motivators gave required pace to the program. The financial help of rupees 5000 per month by Unicef in the form of honorarium to Block motivators also helped a lot.

Trainings were also conducted for Village motivators and the gram Pradhans from the district. For regularly motivating the motivators the district coordinators regularly visited the villages.

The success of this program had a great role of timely actions and effective monitoring. For the transfer of funds the District Magistrate and the Chief Development Officer gave the District Panchayat Raj Officer a full liberty and with the efforts of Chief Accountant Mr. Rohtash Kumar and the manager of the UP Gramin Bank Mr Ranveer Singh it became possible to transfer funds from the district to the gram panchayats. Mr. Singh took care of any difficulty faced in the transfer of funds by talking to his district staff on phone. The support extended by the banks helped in providing the much needed pace to this program. As regards the monitoring the progress, the BDOs of the concerned Block were made responsible for the Block and additionally the District level officers were made responsible for 2-3 Blocks. What the Total Sanitation Campaign had been lacking was the identification and appointment of the village motivators. This being the key to motivation at the village level, the Village motivators and the Block Motivators were appointed and trained.

The District Magistrate had ensured for effective monitoring the daily assessment of progress by e-mails every evening. The District Panchayat Raj Officer collected daily progress from the villages and reported it to the District Magistrate. Every evening at 8 pm the District Magistrate assessed the report and compared with the last days progress and talked about the progress block wise by the SDMs, BDOs and the DPRO. SDMs took regular meetings at the tehsil level and provided whatever support they needed. This new experiment at the district level proved a success. The role of BDOs is especially worth appreciation in this entire program. The Block Development Officers have undertaken meetings at village level and did effective monitoring of the program at the block level.

There is also an effort to get the toilets constructed in houses of the workers connected with the government machinery. The departments in the district are providing with the information on the status of the toilets in the houses of their employees and those who do not have a toilet are being motivated to go for it and this has shown a positive response. From the Shiksha Mitra in education department to ration dealers in the District Supply office all have started constructing toilets in their houses.

The resources available in the district played an important role in effective monitoring of the program. The District Magistrate has spared one of his Personal Assistants fully to get reports from the district officials. The three desktops and four laptops available in the DPRO's office helped in imparting the information timely and compiling the achievements and its reports. All the assistants in the office of the District Panchayat Raj Office are computer friendly and that helps a lot. The District Facilitator Mr. Ahmad Shahvez of the UN- Joint Convergence Program, District Coordinator Parikshit Seth and District TSC Coordinator have worked hard to get the things in line and to make the progress available online.

### **Responses:**

The program faced a varied series of responses from all connected with the conversion drive. The first and foremost to refer here is the community response- This was not an easy task to get the community motivated for the conversion of the dry latrines. A series of meetings that exceeds more than a hundred were held with the community chaired by a district level officer or the BDO or SDM. The first question of the community at majority of the places was regarding the need of the pour flush toilets. Second question that was raised was regarding the high cost needed to convert the dry latrines. They were very concerned about the high cost incurred in converting but when the model was built and shown to them in one or two places then only they got convinced of the possibility of converting the dry latrine within the minimum amount of 1600. The best part of this conversion drive is that there is 100% usage of all the toilets that were converted in the villages. And this could be made possible only by the community involvement that was ensured before initiating the conversion work in the district.

The second response was that of the Manual Scavengers those were not ready to leave their age old profession. They were skeptical of the promises made by the government in general and that it takes much time to get some things done from the government. They were convinced by providing them with immediate relief as discussed in detail above. A major task was done by the posters that were developed and displayed at these villages urging the Manual Scavengers to discard this work. The Balmiki Sena leaders who joined the program also played a positive role in convincing the people engaged in manual scavenging.

The third response was from the officers involved and the staff which had been very positive towards the entire program. As always there were on or two people who lacked the commitment but when they saw the response from



other blocks and the pictures of officers working hard to achieve their targets were displayed in the review meetings they also got motivated.

From several years the community that has been suffering the unimaginable societal discriminations is now looking at the new morning of equality and equity and the district is seeing the silver lining in the dark cloud to eradicate the menace of Manual Scavenging.

### **Sustainability and transferability:**

Manual scavenging is in violation to the Act of Parliament (The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993 and Supreme Court direction. Apart from violation of law, it is an issue of human worth, dignity and freedom. Conversion of dry latrines is, however, key to eliminating the practice of manual scavenging.

A large number of dry latrines still exist in many parts of India. The initiative is sustainable and transferable both because Total Sanitation Campaign which is a national flagship program of Government of India has been the focal point of this. Major components of the drive are taken from various government schemes which are there in every district. Further there is people's participation in the drive. Confidence building and rehabilitation of rescued manual scavengers has been superb and that is probably the reason that now the initiative is demand-driven. Both the manual scavengers and common village people are coming up to ask when the drive would start in their village. A very important point is that the popularization of the Low cost toilet technology by the support of Unicef had made this initiative possible to a large extent. Poor people who could not afford a square meal were hesitant to go for an unexpected expenditure on toilet. But the low cost model came to their rescue. With the money they would have paid in 3-4 years for cleaning the dry latrines, they can now get a toilet that will work for them. The Total Sanitation Campaign has a provision of incentive for the people living below the poverty line. There is also the provision for poor people those are not included in BPL list, to the extent of 10% of the total beneficiaries. It is noted that once the process of constructing pour flush latrines start than householders do not hesitate in investing the money on it despite their financial constraints. The Total Sanitation Campaign has got enough resources to cover up the Information-Education-Communication expenditure.

The other livelihood benefits and social security measures already exist in the form of various government schemes, for the rehabilitation of the manual

scavengers. As regards the amalgamation of those leaving the job of manual scavengers with the rest of the society, it is definitely a time taking process. But there have been instances in the period of just six months where community has offered them with cultivation works and other jobs as well. NREGA has also acted well to bring about equality among the community by providing labor work to all irrespective of caste or gender. The relief on the faces of women is quite obvious and the children are now enthused with self esteem that is worth noticeable.

The news that the district had made by its efforts in the local and the national media had again given rounds of discussion among the development workers and the government as well [ see *The Hindu*, 22 November; The Citizens News Service <http://www.citizen-news.org/2010/08/manual-scavenging-to-be-flushed-away.html>];. There have been communications from the other districts with the district officials of Budaun regarding the implementation of the program.

Since the launch of program 28000 dry latrines have been converted. 3000 village level government functionaries have constructed their own toilets. All of above have 100% usage. APL families are constructing toilets on their own and a large number of them are investing five to ten thousand rupees. Over 500 meeting have been organized in the villages over health and sanitation issues. Local newspapers have also taken the initiative and are reporting daily on the issue together with other sanitation issues. An initial estimate in the villages, where work was completed early, shows that around only half the numbers of children were found sick during house to house pulse polio activity. Over 1000 scavengers have left the job and have been provided alternative options. For several years a community that has been suffering the unimaginable societal discriminations is now looking at the new morning of equality and equity and the district is seeing the silver lining in the dark cloud to eradicate the polio menace and other health hazards.