Report of the Conference on Sustainable Sanitation: Evidence and Practice

On the 11-12 of December 2017, the Scaling City Institutions For India: Sanitation (SCI-FI) and Accountability Initiative at CPR, organized a workshop and conference on Sustainable Sanitation: Evidence and Practice. The workshop was held on 11 December as a closed-door event that invited policy-makers, practitioners past and present and government officials tasked with managing and overseeing the daily implementation of government sanitation schemes, especially both parts of the Swacch Bharat Mission (SBM). The conference, on 12 December, was a wider group inviting discussion on both the lessons from the workshop and a broader set of themes surrounding the conceptualization, implementation and future prospects of sanitation programs in India, with a special focus on the sustainable waste management and Faecal Sludge Management (FSM) scenarios.

Opening Session: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Sanitation: Evidence and Practice

Panelists:

Deepak Sanan (Former Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Himachal Pradesh)

Arkaja Singh (Fellow, Centre for Policy Research

Arkaja Singh

In her opening remarks, Arkaja Singh pointed out that SBM is a significant departure from previous urban programs insofar as it focuses on last mile service delivery and on Urban Local Body (ULB) participation and programmatic success seems defined solely by program metrics. One way to understand this might be that state-citizen partnerships are being reconfigured and that local governance is the focus of the program, placing a host of new responsibilities on ULBs such as FSM, Solid Waste Management (SWM), etc. However, this theory does not match reality. Funding allocations do not match the stated goal of the programme- it is dedicated mostly to Individual HouseHold Latrine (IHHL) construction and to SWM, not to liquid waste management or other stated goals. Given that few ULBs in India have developed sophisticated planning and implementation capacity, certain states where ULB reforms have worked have outperformed other states in the SBM program; in other words, the scheme does not provide ("does not have a very clear path") for ULB reforms that can lead to sustainable sanitation service delivery. Also, the focus on targets, namely IHHL construction and ODF declaration, creates perverse incentives on the part of cities and states, pushing them towards false ODF declarations and results in an inclination towards 'window dressing' rather than generating real sustainable change in the sanitation situation. The program has brought a new focus on the waste generated by human activities in both urban and rural areas and, thus, while contributing to a new definition of sustainable sanitation the program has failed to take adequate efforts towards that goal. Finally, Ms. Singh discussed the issues of sanitation work and manual scavenging within the context of the SBM. Eradication of manual scavenging is recognized as a chief programmatic goal and while the technologies and programs that SBM creates have an

indirect effect on unsafe sanitation work, it is clearly not enough. The program has failed to provide clear incentives to different actors within the system to operationalize these targets. The program makes it harder to combat manual scavenging in two ways, first by incentivizing local actors to prioritize program targets over combating instances of manual scavenging and, secondly, by building thousands of toilets without sufficient attention to containment technologies and integration with the FSM value chain.

Deepak Sanan

Deepak Sanan opened his remarks by providing a summary of discussions at the previous day's workshop. The workshop had included a mix of practitioners and individuals working with the implementation of SBM at various levels, whether as civil servants, or civil society or even elected representatives. The workshop aimed to gather different ideas and perspectives on India's progress in creating sustainable sanitation systems and how a CLTS-centered approach in particular has contributed to these program targets. At a broad level, the understanding on the ground is that the SBM program in particular and sanitation schemes in general are still mired in rigidity- program guidelines do not give states much flexibility to tailor the delivery of sanitation services to their local realities. Rather, these schemes lay down extensive guidelines for every aspect of the program. Hence, practitioners do feel that sanitation programs need to create the space for innovative local action, as articulated by the scheme guidelines. Mr. Sanan mentioned that rather than engaging in normative debates about the utility of household subsidies for household sanitation infrastructure, all participants in the workshop, whether CLTS practitioners, government officials or members of the civil society, agreed that "community ownership" is key to achieving sustainable sanitation.

He expanded on this theme by pointing out that the concept of 'collective behavior change' is now accepted wisdom, beginning with the Nirmal Gram Puraskar and now embedded in the SBM-mandated goal of 'ODF communities'. However, the pursuit of this goal is hampered by the enormous pressure on cities and states to maintain a certain pace on toilet construction targets and ODF declarations. While many practitioners feel that this current target-driven approach will be counterproductive to achieving sustainable sanitation, part of the workshop's rationale and purpose is to take stock of the evidence base regarding this claim and how the research community can a) gather structured evidence on the actual contribution of SBM-type programs to achievement of sustainable sanitation and, b) use this new form of evidence to distinguish between which program designs lead only to 'declaration' type achievements and which designs actually further the goal of sustainable sanitation. Mr. Sanan pointed out that, given the current drive to achieve sanitation targets, the government is inherently unsuitable for collecting unbiased evidence on whether such approaches lead to actual achievements. This recognition opens the space for third-party researchers to build such an evidence base, which is hoped to be a key outcome of the conference.

Session 2: Current Understandings of Swacch Bharat Mission (Gramin) Implementation

Chair: Avani Kapur, Director, Accountability Initiative, Centre for Policy Research

Panelists:

VR Raman, Head, Policy, WaterAid India

Nikhil Srivastav, Research and Policy Manager, Research Institute for Compassionate Economics

Devashish Deshpande, Senior Research Associate, Accountability Initiative, Centre for Policy Research

Avani Kapur

Continuing where Deepak Sanan left off, Ms. Kapur highlighted the importance of the research community in providing "credible, reliable, regular and rigorous evidence" to evaluate sanitation program design and ultimately inform policy.

VR Raman (WaterAid)

Mr. Raman began by asking whether SBM(G) is researchable given the enormous time constraints and pressure on targets and consequently whether current research paradigms and outputs are informing policy and governance processes in desired ways. In other words, sanitation research should be 'Timely, Actionable and Relevant' The current state of sanitation research does not fulfill those needs. A common theme in Mr. Raman's remarks, drawing on his experience with multiple national flagship government programs, is that the achievements of SBM are unprecedented not just in scale and scope but also the timelines imposed on all tiers of governance, which again limits the traditional feedback mechanisms from research. Thus, researchers need to understand and elucidate the distinction between toilet construction at household level and actual behavior changes at the community level.

As a 'development partner' with the government and implementing agencies, WaterAid's research is rooted in an advocacy approach, by using the studies and findings to inform the overall sanitation mission. He outlined several pieces of research, both completed and ongoing, including: three studies on how the behavior change approach is being implemented; studies on identifying gaps and triggering course corrections on orthodox forms of toilet technology, including one study that showed only thirty three percent of currently built toilets satisfy the 'safe and sustainable' sanitation parameter and another studying the relative prevalence of twin-pit and single pit collection

mechanisms; research on hygiene practices meaning not just handwashing practices but also menstrual hygiene and other practices.
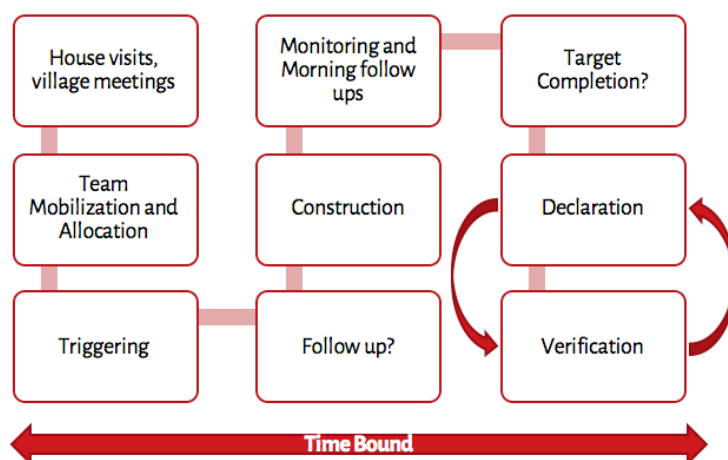
Nikhil Srivastava, RICE

Mr. Srivastava of RICE began his presentation by discussing the Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) 2015 figures which show not only that sixty percent of open defecation in the world was concentrated in India but also that only ten percent of latrine users in India chose simple toilets. The preference for simple toilets is much higher in comparator regions like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sub Saharan Africa. Mr Srivastava showed that this preference is not explained by indicators like education levels or by geographical conditions like water scarcity and access to water. Hence, RICE carried out two studies to explore this discrepancy- the Sanitation Quality, Use, Access and Trends (SQUAT) survey and the Switching survey. The SQUAT survey showed that latrine access does not equal latrine use- forty percent of latrine owning households in the SQUAT sample had at least one member who defecated in the open. Furthermore, government constructed latrines are less likely to be used than government supported or privately constructed latrines. The survey found that respondents took issue with the pit size in government latrines- the pit volume in privately constructed latrines was nearly 50 times the WHO-recommended size. The study concluded that this is a consequence of Indian attitudes to caste and the perception of social pollution and a stigma associated with manual scavenging. Mr. Srivastava pointed out that these studies raised three major points- a) typical development and welfare indicators do not explain the lack of safe sanitation in rural India, b) there is a need to think about different kinds of latrines and toilet technologies, c) Are current sanitation programs explicitly addressing the problem of caste and manual scavenging?

Devashish Deshpande, Accountability Initiative

 Mr. Deshpande opened his presentation by laying out the issues with large-scale research, in that it only offers large-scale solutions. The Accountability Initiative's research focuses instead on the processes-administrative and otherwise- by which villages in India are constructing toilets and how are ODF declarations happening? The research documents the process by which an ODF-declaration happens:

The typical route to ODF

The study notes two key points, a) the process declares ODF before verifying and, b) the time taken to reach the ODF target seems to matter more to government and local stakeholders than perhaps the actual status. The deviation in 'community approaches' mandated by SBM begins here- while IEC activities do happen, they are limited and have not moved to encompass social and behavioral change. IEC activities tend to focus on the monetary subsidy and issues of women's sanitation as an incentive to build toilets.

Multiple levels of governance are involved in these processes. One of the findings is that while the demand side, consisting of households, their aspirations and their financial constraints, is relatively straightforward, the supply side involving government service delivery is more convoluted. Toilet delivery involves masons (with no technical sanitation knowledge), the panchayats and then various levels of government administration- block, district, state and Centre. With such multiple and overlapping layers of administration, there need to be clear incentives that can enable service delivery. These typically take the form of promises of 'political mileage' or forms of political clientelism. However, any type of sustainable service delivery are hampered by the massive lack of capacity within the state and local government structures and the lack of incentives within the scheme to develop this long-term capacity.

The research also examined the delivery of financial incentives under SBM(G). Incentives are delivered under a set of eligibility criteria, established on a baseline survey done previously- but since the baseline survey was carried out prior to scheme conceptualization, it was done in a haphazard way and determined the target allocation- which does not allow the scheme to be modified in response to changes in the context. Furthermore, opaqueness in the eligibility criteria excludes sections who may actually benefit from the scheme. Mr. Deshpande concluded by referring to the

developing public health crisis caused by the accumulation of faecal sludge in one place because of the lack of effective faecal sludge management practices.

Session 3: Inclusive City-Wide Sanitation in Swacch Bharat Mission (Urban) and AMRUT

Chair: Shakti Sinha, Director, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (IAS, retd)

Panelists:

Dr. Kanchan Mathur, Director, Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur and Dr. Shobhita Rajagopal, Associate Professor, Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur

Dr. Ranjit Mohanty & Anju Dwivedi, Senior Researcher, Centre for Policy Research

Dr. Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay, Director, Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)

Shubhagato Dasgupta, Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research

Shakti Sinha

This session shifted the conference's focus from rural to urban sanitation and discussed the array of challenges and opportunities encountered by sanitation programmes in Indian towns and cities, with a special focus on SBM (Urban) and AMRUT.

The chair of the session, Shakti Sinha, Director, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (IAS, retd.), opened the discussion by presenting an outline of the dynamic urban landscape in the country. The rapid growth in urban population, particularly over the last decade, has created a need for practitioners, policy makers and researchers to focus on urban services, with urban sanitation being one of the most pressing concerns. Mr. Sinha highlighted the gap between deman and supply in urban sanitation research; data clearly indicates that urban sanitation in India remains an unmet ideal yet our knowledge of urban contexts continues to be limited. For researchers, he pointed out that academic interest on urban issues is also not as evolved as the rural counterpart, and the lack of granular data for urban sanitation remains a major gap. Reiterating Mr. Sanan's concerns and the issues raised by various stakeholders in the previous day', Mr. Sinha discussed the matter of how policies can grapple with the diverse milieu and specific concerns of small towns, cities, and large metropolises and posited that the principle of flexibility must replace the "one-size-fits-all" approach.

Dr. Kanchan Mathur and Dr. Shobhita Rajagopal Institute of Development Studies (IDS)

Dr. Kanchan Mathur and Dr. Shobhita Rajagopal presented insights from their mid-line assessment study of CFAR's intervention on community engagement in WASH from three cities- Delhi, Jaipur and Kolkata. Data for the assessment was collected through FGDs, interviews and observations with a wide range of stakeholders, including women, men, adolescent girls and boys, community management committees (CMCs), as well as government officials.

The presentation demonstrated that the main strength of CFAR's initiatives was its success in transforming the attitude of government officials vis a vis communities, changing their view from citizens as passive users to citizens as active participants in all aspects of the sanitation value chain. The presentation also touched upon instances of social change from the three cities. CMCs were found to be particularly effective in Delhi where the Committees had an MOU with DUSIB for the construction of new toilets and maintenance of CTCs. Women forums in Delhi were also presented as a success story that built pressure on the local police to ensure safe access to CTCs. The assessment pointed out that CFAR's intervention also engaged with men who are usually ignored in the gender discourse. In Jaipur, men actively participated in the mapping of informal settlements and their access to sanitation. Kishore and Kishori youth groups collaborated with schools in Kolkata to focus on safe menstrual hygiene practices.

The presentation also highlighted the shortcomings in the policy framework on sanitation. Presently, there is no stipulation in the framework to ensure that gender needs are necessarily acknowledged and addressed in city sanitation planning. Furthermore, there is a lack of convergence in sanitation outcomes since multiple agencies have overlapping responsibilities. The presentation concluded that the main challenge to community engagement in WASH is to find pathways towards building trust between communities and government officials.

Dr. Ranjita Mohanty & Anju Dwivedi, Senior Researcher, Centre for Policy Research

Dr. Ranjita Mohanty and Anju Dwivedi presented their ethnographic study on inclusive sanitation focusing on two small towns in Odisha- Angul and Dhenkanal. The field sites of the study included eleven unauthorised slums in Dhenkanal, and ten slums in Angul. The study explored the extent to which socio-cultural norms, behaviour and practices influence sanitation in small towns.

The presentation began with a discussion on those cultural beliefs and norms that have strong linkages with sanitation-related choices and practices. The type of sanitation infrastructure that is chosen and accessed by a household- its location, as well as the time of use- were noted to be entwined in traditional notions associated with 'pure' and 'impure' spaces. Further, it was pointed out that sanitation programmes are geared towards toilet construction, which has largely sidetracked the objective of achieving community participation. The presentation concluded by reflecting on the question of how sanitation programmes can be made more inclusive. Ensuring that the objectives and targets set out in programmes are not divorced from the cultural beliefs and norms which shape communities' sanitation practices was discussed to be a crucial factor in achieving inclusive, sanitary urban environments.

Dr. Bandyopadhyay, Director, Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)

Kaustav Kanti Bandopadhyay's presentation titled 'How inclusive is sanitation services?' presented the findings from a survey carried out between June and August of 2017 across the cities of Jhansi, Ajmer and Muzzaffarpur. The data presented was only from Jhansi and Ajmer, as the Muzzaffarpur data has

not been processed yet. The idea was to look at the participation of the urban poor in the process of implementation of SBM-U.

The survey found that the conditions for acquiring the SBM subsidy highly affected the programme's coverage. Complicated application procedure and the requirement of documents led to several applications being rejected. A severe underestimation of informal settlements, and a miscount of slum communities was found to be another loophole in the programme's implementation. Older colonies that had now grown into middle class neighbourhoods also continued to be classified as slums. In both cities, the most dominant reason for not having a toilet was that it was too expensive, followed by the lack of knowledge for toilet application.

Shubhagato Dasgupta, Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research

Mr. Dasgupta began his presentation by tracing the evolution of research and policy on sanitation issues in Indian towns and cities and shared insights on strengthening the planning framework for sanitation. His presentation began with highlights on the trajectory of urban sanitation in India which has gained momentum only over the past fifteen years. He described how a combination of the 74th Constitutional Amendment that instituted decentralization of urban service delivery and international programmatic developments have contributed to bringing the focus on sanitation provisioning in India. In 2008, the launch of National Urban Sanitation Policy brought exclusive focus on urban sanitation. Further, Mr. Dasgupta discussed that the global standards on monitoring SDGs, which take into account the entire sanitation value chain, have also realigned priorities in India.

The second part of the presentation focused on contemporary challenges and policy responses to sanitation in towns and cities. The rate of open defecation in urban India came down to around 13 percent in 2011, but a more pressing concern is to ensure safe disposal and treatment of waste in towns and cities, or achieve an Open Discharge Free environment. Further, special emphasis was put on the hazardous working conditions of sanitation workers, which make up around 2 percent of the national workforce. Mr. Dasgupta suggested that decentralized funding and accountability on local bodies to ensure use of equipment and protective gear can ensure timely maintenance of infrastructures, not compromising on workers' safety. The presentation also covered some specific shortcomings of SBM (U). Out of its six objectives, SBM has funding mandate for the construction of toilets only. The other five objectives, including eradication of manual scavenging by 2019, are not accorded any such mandate. Moreover, while the tenure of land is not a prerequisite for construction of community facilities in policy, but on the ground, acquisition of land continues to be a difficult process. This issue, Mr. Dasgupta highlighted, has only been covered peripherally in SBM and AMRUT.

Mr. Dasgupta concluded his presentation by noting that the current policy environment is marked by overlapping roles and schemes (policies like Housing for All also covers toilet construction), fragmented programmes, limited autonomy to ULBs and weak links with citizens. He urged the gathering to focus on a stronger post-2019 sanitation agenda, beginning with points of integration and convergence between various schemes and institutions which are responsible to address concerns pertaining to urban sanitation.

Session 4: Panel Discussion on lessons from research and implementation experience

Chair: Deepak Sanan (Former Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Himachal Pradesh)

Panelists:

Adil Zainulbhai, Chairman, Quality Council of India

Akshay Kumar Rout, Director General (Special Project-SBM), Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation

Konda Vishweshwar Reddy,Honorable Member of Parliament, Telangana Rashtra Samiti(TRS)

Yamini Aiyar, President and CEO, Centre for Policy Research

Shubhagato Dasgupta, Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research

Adil Zainulbhai, Chairman, Quality Council of India

Adil Zainulbhai, Chairman of the Quality Council of India, opened his remarks by explaining the methodology used by QCI in the large scale rural survey of the Swachh Bharat Mission. The purpose of the survey was to assess the implementation of the programme on ground. The scope of the survey was limited to construction and use of the newly built toilets under SBM (G). The survey was scaled up to 1,40,000 households over 3500 villages across all the districts over a period of 6-8 weeks. It aimed to provide data and credible information for the government, policy makers and other stakeholders of the on-ground implementation of the project and draw the attention of the government for the post correction of the policy. Mr. Zainulbhai drew upon the findings from the survey to emphasise that the construction of toilets highly increases the possibility of usage. Furthermore, geo-tagging of all the households surveyed would enable a future survey of these households, thus helping policymakers and practioners to better understand the sustainability of sanitation practices and programs in rural areas. Focusing on urban areas, Mr. Zainulbhai said that the technology and innovation would help eliminate open defecation practices, and specifically discussed the MoUD, now renamed as Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, led efforts for mapping of community and public toilets in the top 150 cities of India that would make these locations available on Google Maps along with user ratings.

Akshay Kumar Rout, Director General (Special Project-SBM), Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation

Akshay Kumar Rout emphasised that the foundational principal of the SBM (G) is behavioral change and accordingly MDWS has focused on initaitves that could bring about collective and individual behavioral change. Expanding on this theme, Mr. Rout remarked that achieving ODF-status should be about sustained behavioral change rather than simply constructing toilets for sustainable sanitation. Referring to SBM as "a program of the people and for the people", he said that relentless efforts among communities and an adoption of community led approaches are the only effective way for bringing

about behavioral changes. To further this engagement, Mr. Rout described how the government is actively interacting with communities at various levels.

On the issue of post-ODF scenarios, Mr. Rout remarked that ODF sustainability should serve as the larger framework for sustainable sanitation and ,accordingly, MDWS has developed mechanisms to ensure high-quality ODF monitoring and evaluation. He highlighted that the self-declaration process of ODF status is monitored by monitors at national level and there is also a provision of third party investigation from organization like QCI and independent investigation agencies such as banks and multi-lateral organizations to keep a check on the credibility of the self-certification system. He also explained that a Housekeeping exercise has been undertaken by the ministry to ensure that the ODF villages are verified regularly.

Konda Vishweshwar Reddy, Honorable Member of Parliament, Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS)

The Honorable MP provided us with some experiences from his own constituency in Telangana. He declared that many villages who have been awarded ODF-status are not ODF in reality and attributed health consequences like stunted growth, malnutrition to poor sanitation practices rather than nutrition. He also discussed the discrepancy in policies with regard to design of individual household latrines. For example, the government is promoting leach pit as a technical solution but that subsequently contaminates the ground water, one of the main source of drinking water in rural areas, He also shared a success story from one of the government school in his constituency. Finding a person to clean the toilet in the school was, according to him the most challenging due to the social stigma attached with the job and the job being quite underpaid. Engaging the political leaders (MLA, MPs and Ministers) at the village level and providing a career path to the job with decent pay, protective gear, resources and other basic necessities, this job became quite popular in the area with a better social status. Citing this case study he was of the opinion that people across the caste are engaged in the occupation and the financial incentive and abatement of social stigma would encourage more people to take up this job.

Yamini Aiyar, President and CEO, Centre for Policy Research

Yamini Aiyar brought the debate back to the challenges in accurately measuring sanitation outcomes and achievements. The limits in data collection and availability have a direct impact on the accountability of the scheme. Ms. Aiyar highlighted a central discrepancy in the program's design, that the SBM's main goal seems to be behavioral change but the monitoring metrics focus only on infrastructure outputs like toilets. Therefore, a central question raised by Ms. Aiyar is "what is the data more relevant to citizens and what is it that we should spend time studying, collecting, measuring and presenting and how can this system made accountable to what it actually set out to do?" Terming the accountability story in sanitation as far more complex than usually discussed, Ms. Aiyar explained that the current sanitation story reverses the typical state-citizen relationship with regard to public goods, wherein rather than citizens asking for sanitation services from the government as their right, it is the government enforcing a certain modality of sanitation on citizens and forcing them to assert their responsibilities. Ms. Aiyar called for citizen engagement and greater participation in the process for the accountability aspect of the program. In this regard, she mentioned that the government's current

outreach effort emphasizes toilet construction and the third party measurement system which misses the importance of measurement as part and parcel of citizen engagement, participation and debate. She opined that both the objective of citizens' participation and large data for monitoring and evaluation of the program could be achieved through community led approach with the participation of NGOs, local community group and citizens. Ms. Aiyar also highlighted the paradigm shift the sanitation story with shift from toilet construction in early 1990s and 2000 to open defecation in the current scenario. Underlining the missing link between the health and sanitation, she made a call for tracking health outcomes that would better help serve the measurement debate on sanitation. She concluded with emphasizing the danger in allowing toilet construction and ODF, originally designed as outcomes, to become the target that is to be achieved by all. For truly sustainable sanitation, Ms. Aiyar asked the research community to focus the measurement and analysis of sanitation outcomes on better sanitation for better health outcome and called for a different lens on measurement of sanitation success.

Shubhagato Dasgupta, Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research

Taking the discussion forward from the urban lens, Shubhagato Dasgupta mentions that the drivers and motivation are different at household levels in different communities across different urban milieus. Thus, to grasp the complexities of sanitation challenges at various levels in India, a multidisciplinary approach is required to address the sanitation problem. Furthermore, Mr. Dasgupta pointed out that different modes of multidisciplinary measurement would also help understand how sanitation problem affects community and government at different scales and levels and suggested that flexible policies would help implement these approaches in better and more effective ways.