VIOLENCE GENDER & WASH

A PRACTITIONER'S TOOLKIT

Making water, sanitation and hygiene safer through improved programming and services

Toolset 3-D

Community-managed latrine blocks

TS3-D-2 – Community-managed sanitation supporting the emancipation of scavengers: Sulabh International, India

Context	Sulabh International Social Service Organisation was established as a non-profit voluntary organisation in 1970 working for the removal of 'untouchability' and social discrimination against scavengers (or *Balmikis*), a section of Indian society condemned to clean and carry human excreta manually. Scavenging is the practice of manual cleaning of human excreta from service/dry latrines. The scavengers crawl into the dry latrines and collect the human excreta with their bare hands, then carry it as a head-load in a container for disposal. It is a caste-based and hereditary profession, which is handed down as a legacy from one generation to the next. Scavengers are the most oppressed and suppressed class of Indian society – hated, ostracised, vilified and avoided by all other castes and classes. Scavengers come into direct contact with human excreta and their hands are completely soiled. In a congested locality, the scavenger has to crawl through a narrow passage, pushing the basket with one hand, resting his/her body weight on the other to make their way up to the latrine chamber through a narrow opening. In a latrine where the seat is deep inside, he/she has to stretch their hand to the fullest and thrust his/her head into the hole to clean the toilet. The scavenger has to bend forward into the narrow space to clean excreta from the toilet antechambers. It is a common sight to see scavengers, mostly women, moving with excreta on the head, stored in bamboo baskets or in leaking drums, with the muck trickling down over their face and body. Passers-by avoid such persons. If a scavenger comes in close proximity, he or she is showered with a hail of abuse. The scavengers face cruel and inhuman treatment.
Implementing organisations	Sulabh International Social Service Organisation.
Description of good practices	The founder of Sulabh International, Dr Bindeshwar Pathak, clearly realised that the liberation and rehabilitation of scavengers or *Balmikis* was not an easy task: to help them break out of the vicious circle and join the mainstream of society. Hence a multi-pronged strategy was developed to rehabilitate the *Balmikis* by providing them with alternative employment and integrating them into the mainstream. This strategy consisted of a mixed package of technology and rehabilitation, with alternative employment and social reform. This holistic approach is radically different from other social reform movements in that it combines technology with social idealism. The Sulabh approach to restore human dignity to *Balmikis* has five distinct stages: • Liberation • Rehabilitation • Vocational training

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- Proper education of the next generation
- Social elevation

Technologies:

Traditionally, no attention was paid to the occupational hazards of hygiene and health associated with scavenging. A technology was developed to convert bucket latrines into flush toilets. The two-pit pour-flush toilets developed by Sulabh caught the imagination of the nation and as a result Sulabh public and individual toilets were established all over India. At the same time, Sulabh took care to provide alternative jobs to the *Balmikis* rendered jobless by the large-scale conversion of privy latrines into Sulabh toilets.

Skill development and vocational training:

Skill development is important for all, but it is crucial for the less educated. Not only are the *Balmikis* low in literacy and education, but they also possess few skills that merit market demand. Sulabh has paid special attention to skills development and vocational training for children from the *Balmiki* community. It has set up many centres and institutions across the country to equip wards from this community with vocational training in many market-friendly trades. Training programmes have included trades such as shorthand, typing, driving, mechanics, masonry work, carpentry, cane work etc.

Social adoption:

The problem for the *Balmikis* is as much sociocultural as it is economical. Traditions take time to change and require the will and initiative from all sections of society. Sulabh has evolved the modality of 'social adoption' with this in view. It is purely voluntary: all it costs is a will to shed social prejudices and compassion for fellow humans. A well-meaning and committed citizen formally and publicly adopts a *Balmiki* family. Subsequently, the two closely interact and visit each other's homes. At times, the adopting person helps the adopted family to get over minor or major problems of social adjustment. As adopters are generally persons of social standing and prestige, through their approach and interaction they become role models for others.

Public toilet blocks, their financial viability and collaboration between actors:

Sulabh has made excreta financially viable. A local body meets the cost of construction, while the maintenance of toilet blocks and day-to-day expenses are met from a users' charge. Sulabh does not depend on external agencies for finances and meets all the financial obligations from its own internal resources. Not all of the toilet complexes are self-sustaining, particularly those located in slums and less developed areas. The maintenance of such toilet complexes is cross-subsidised from the income generated from toilet complexes in busy and developed areas. Sulabh provides a 30-year maintenance guarantee for the toilet complexes constructed.
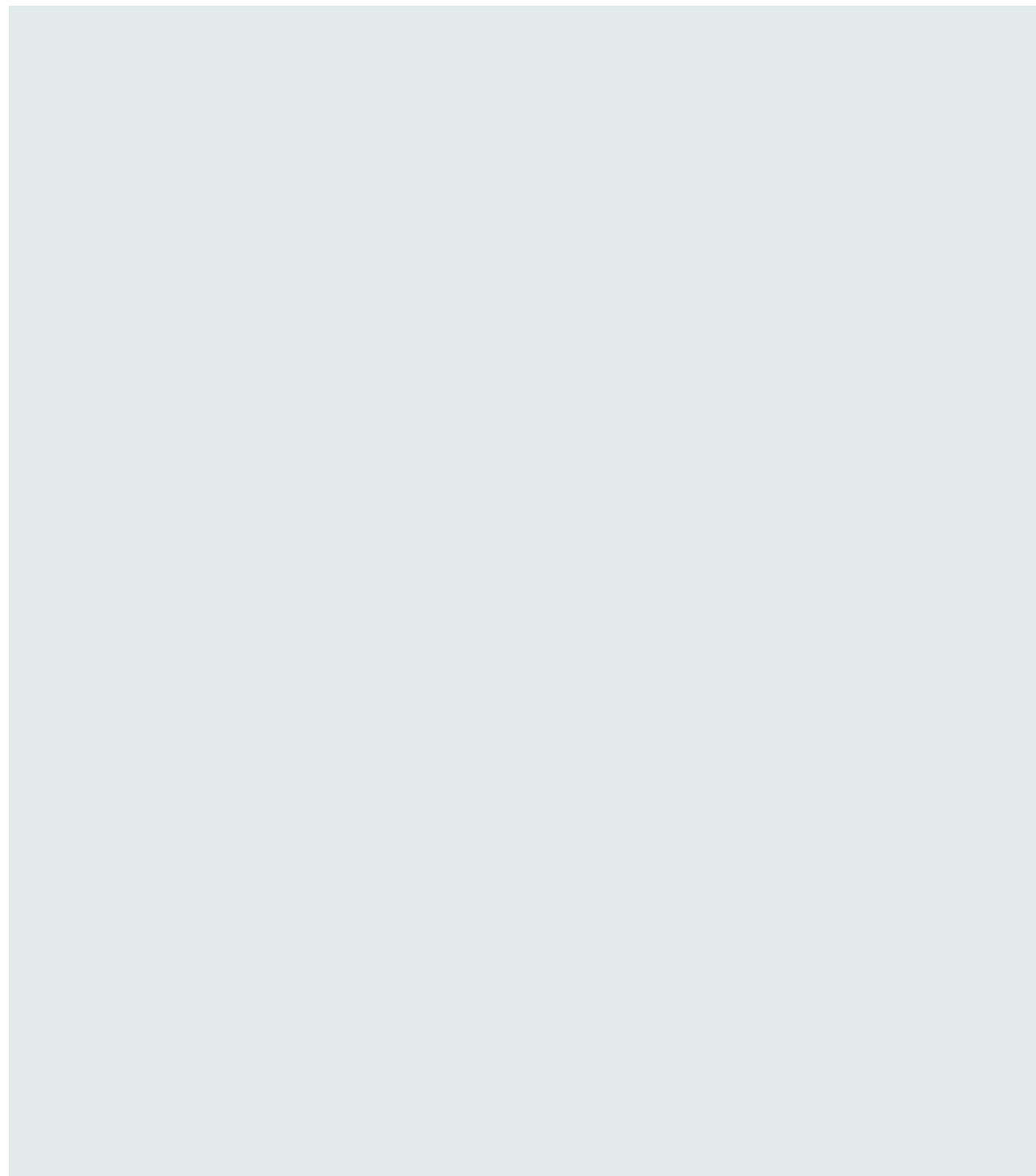
The task of total sanitation coverage in any country can be fulfilled only through close co-operation between local government and the community or local NGOs involved with such work. Neither government nor NGOs/CBOs can fulfil the task alone, as the problem requires both technical as well as social aspects to be tackled. The strategy developed by Sulabh can easily be replicated in other developing countries to improve the status of sanitation and people's quality of life.

Results

Data to 2011:

- Sulabh has been able to liberate and rehabilitate more than 1 million *Balmikis* during its four-decade long struggle;
- Sulabh has supported 8,000+ public latrine blocks across India;
- 640 towns have been made scavenging free;

- An estimated 1.2 million Sulabh household toilets have been constructed, while 54 million government toilets have been built based on the Sulabh design;

- Altogether there are 60,000 volunteers working with Sulabh who include technocrats, managers, scientists, engineers, social scientists, doctors, architects, planners and other non-revenue staff;

- Sulabh International, in collaboration with UN-HABITAT, Nairobi, has trained professionals from 14 African countries to improve capacity development towards achieving the MDG for sustainable development in water and sanitation;

- The Sulabh technologies have received worldwide recognition;

- Sulabh has trained more than 50,000 people to work in the construction and maintenance of community toilets in India;

- Sulabh's founder, Dr Bindeshwar Pathak, was awarded the Stockholm Water Prize 2009.

Challenges

- The historic discrimination of the scavenging communities, which was engrained in societal practices across India;

- Technologies which supported scavenging practices (bucket latrines); and

- Poor education and lack of marketable skills on the part of the scavenging communities and their children.

Lessons

A multi-pronged strategy, including the provision of alternative employment and integrating the scavenging communities into the mainstream by using a mixed package of technology and rehabilitation, with alternative employment and social reform, has been shown to be an effective method in the process of breaking down historic and engrained discrimination against the scavenger communities.

References/Links

The above information and data has been taken from:

- Sulabh International Social Service Organisation.
  Available at: **http://www.sulabhinternational.org/?q=content/sulabh-story-brief**
  [accessed 19 May 2013].

- Journeymanpictures, Video: 'The scavengers, India'.
  Available at: **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCecQrh8AZo**
  (video length 20.19 min) [accessed 11 October 2013] see **TS2**.

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