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Tackling Open Defecation through Behavioral Change: The Clean India Mission in Punjab State

Some social problems are hard to address because people's willingness to change depends on their expectations of each other. India's recent experience provides insights on overcoming this challenge.

In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a national campaign to eliminate open defecation in five years. Past programs had focused on building toilets, but about half of all Indians still used fields, bushes, and roads to do their business. By contrast, the new campaign focused on social norms as a way to generate behavior change. But exactly how to proceed was left to each state. A veteran administrative service officer, Ajoy Sharma, led the campaign in northern Punjab state. He developed a pilot program that integrated sensitization and social mobilization at the individual, family, and community levels with funding to support toilet construction. The successful pilot provided the evidence he needed to apply a similar template across all districts in the state. By September 2017, the project had certified half of the districts in the state as Open Defecation Free.

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Amarpal Singh (left), a community motivator working for the Clean India program, speaks with residents of the village of Chatwal, in the Patiala district of Punjab. Photo by Arpita Tripathi.

Featured Interview

In this interview, **Jana Telfer** describes her experiences in the Ebola response in Liberia. When she arrived in September of 2014, 60 different NGOs were working on 250 different projects while the lack of a structured communications strategy resulted in incoherent messaging. She explains how coordination facilitated by the national Incident Management System enabled Liberia to develop a sophisticated Ebola message manual. Engaging traditional chiefs in message dissemination also contributed to significant behavior change in communities.



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