

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The lowest growth rate does not indicate that China’s economy is facing a crisis. Instead it’s a process of resolving tough problems, controlling serious risks and finally realising a soft landing.” —GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

Diving into a revolution

Like the sport of diving, Swachh Bharat Mission has had to overcome a ‘degree of difficulty’ to bring about behavioural change



PARAMESWARAN IYER

IT MAY SEEM a bit of a stretch, or even a twist, to compare the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) with the sport of diving, but there is some method in this seeming madness. Let me put you out of your suspense: The common factor is the “Degree of Difficulty” (DoD) multiplication factor. The DoD factor is well recognised in the sport of diving, where it is a numerical value given to a dive, multiplied by the judge’s score of the dive.

The DoD is based on a formula that adds together the different components of a dive. Obviously, the more moves (typically twists and somersaults) attempted in a dive, the greater the value and, therefore, the greater the potential for scoring points. Likewise, under the SBM, there are at least two additional and complex “moves” being attempted compared to typical infrastructure programmes: One, changing behaviour by getting people to use toilets and stop defecating in the open and two, sustaining the changed behaviour over time. The two extra “moves” make the SBM much more difficult to implement. When “judging” SBM, however, most commentators do not factor in the DoD factor in the implementation process.

The SBM’s primary emphasis on the usage of toilets transforms it from an infrastructure-focused “toilet construction” programme to a much more complex behaviour change social revolution. The scale of the challenge at the start of the SBM in October 2014, changing the behaviour of 550 million people living in rural India, significantly added to the DoD. To compound the DoD further, the SBM was marketing a product (household toilets) for which, in most cases, there was no intrinsic demand.

Equilibrium in markets is more easily attained when demand matches supply. For example, electricity, roads and metro rail are all intrinsically in high demand by the intended beneficiaries. So, when supply of these products is facilitated by national flagship programmes, the markets reach some sort of equilibrium. The main challenge in the latter markets where demand exists is efficient and speedy implementation at scale, which is itself no easy task. The SBM “market”, however, is more complex, where there is no inherent demand for “goods” (toilets) due to a “preference” for defecating in the open. From the supply side, therefore, the programme needed to provide both toilets as well as a behaviour programme at scale for changing preferences.

The gurus of marketing tell us that you may have a good product, but you still need to promote it because there may be other similar products in the market which compete with yours. In the case of the SBM, the major competition to toilets was the deeply ingrained habit of open defecation and cultural norm of not having a toilet near one’s residence. While an electric bulb is clearly

preferred over a flickering lamp, a black top road over a kuccha path and rapid transit over traffic jams, the deeply ingrained habit of open defecation posed stiff competition to the alternative new products on offer: Toilet plus behaviour change. Demand for a toilet had to be stimulated to wean people away from the habit of open defecation and this was challenging.

When the prime minister addressed the nation from the Red Fort on August 15, 2014, and spoke about “dignity of women” and the importance of providing toilets to women and girls, many people were shocked because this was a departure from established tradition. The surprise was in part because sanitation was a far from obvious topic for a PM to talk about during his first major national address. But that speech helped to take the toilet out of the closet and put it out in the open, the first promotion of the product, and the first salvo against open defecation.

The four major challenges we faced were the 4 Ss: Scale — 550 million people needed to change their behaviour; Speed — the programme had to be implemented in 5 years; Stigma — centuries-old taboos, for example, it was impure to have a toilet inside or near the home, needed to be challenged; and Sustainability — having to make the recently changed behaviour stick. There was little prior experience of doing all this, which made the learning curve, and the degree of difficulty, even steeper.

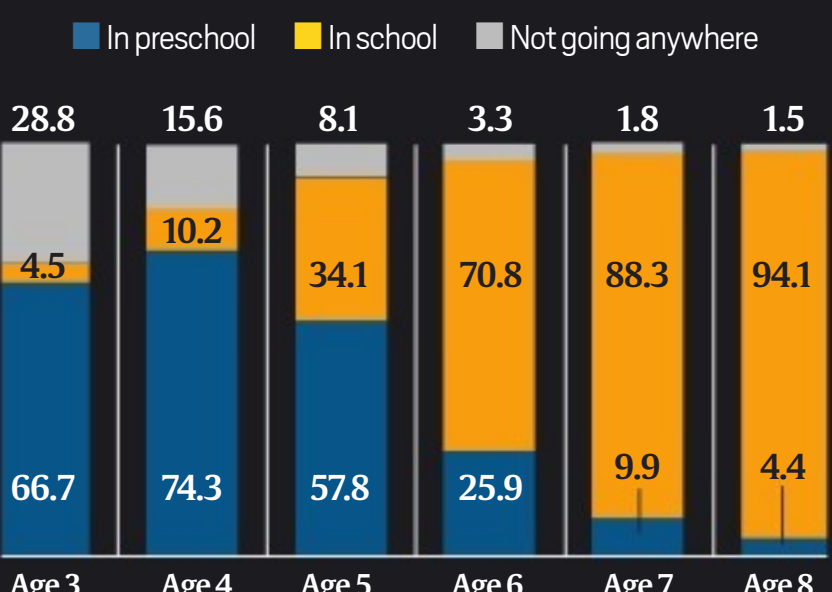
Previous behaviour change attempts in sanitation had focused more on individual households. The SBM learned by doing that if the competing product to toilet usage was open defecation, then that had to be tackled not by engaging with individuals and trying to persuade them to “buy” our product — an individual household twin-pit latrine — but by marketing the product to an entire village community. This was done by using different “triggers” to convince them that open defecation was a public “bad” and that usage of toilets was a public “good”. It took great effort to have trained village motivators (swachhagrahis) familiar with the local language and idiom work to convince the community as a whole that the health and dignity of the entire village were at stake if they persisted in open defecation. It was extremely painstaking work and it literally “took a village”, peer pressure and whole-hearted community participation to make a village ODF.

The degree of difficulty was intensified by the fact that sustaining the change in behaviour is even more difficult than achieving it. To use electoral idiom, you campaign in poetry but govern in prose. Once the enthusiasm and energy of the ODF movement achieves its objective, sustaining the outcome in the cold light of the following day takes even more hard work by way of having systems and incentives in place.

Lessons from the SBM could be usefully applied to other programmes requiring intensive behaviour change campaigns at scale. Here, it would be useful if the diving analogy of DoD were applied to similar programmes attempting to market public good products not intrinsically in demand.

The writer is secretary, Ministry for Drinking Water and Sanitation. Views are personal

Enrolment status of children from age 3 to age 8, 2018



Mithun Chakraborty

What the children learn

ASER data underlines that early education is crucial, one-size-fits-all policy does not work



SUMAN BHATTACHARJEA AND PURNIMA RAMANUJAN

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, or ECE, is included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 that were approved by India among many countries around the globe. SDG Target 4.2 states that by 2030 countries should “ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”.

This global goal emerged thanks to extensive international research in disciplines as varied as neuroscience, psychology and economics, which show that early childhood — defined internationally as the age group of 0-8 years — is a critical period. During this time, the foundations of life-long learning are built, with 90 per cent of all brain development taking place by age six.

In India, too, the importance of early care and stimulation has been recognised in the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education (2013), which aims to provide “developmentally appropriate preschool education for three to six-year-olds with a more structured and planned school readiness component for five to six-year-olds.” The recently created Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan scheme has also brought renewed focus and attention on ECE through the Integrated Scheme on School Education that aims to treat school education “holistically without segmentation from pre-nursery to Class 12”.

There are currently two main avenues for accessing early childhood education in India. The most widespread comprises the 1.3 million anganwadi centres run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development across the country under the Integrated Child Development (ICDS) Scheme. The other is the burgeoning private sector, with more than 40 per cent of privately managed pri-

mary schools reportedly offering pre-primary LKG and UKG classes as well. Some states in India offer a third possibility as well, in the form of preschool classes integrated within government primary schools, for example in Assam and Jammu & Kashmir.

According to the RTE Act, enrolment in formal schools should begin at age six, with ECE exposure recommended for children between age three and six. However, 26 of India’s 35 states and union territories allow children to enter Class 1 at age five. National trends from the recently released Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2018) indicate that enrolment patterns broadly meet these policy prescriptions. At age three, two-thirds of children were enrolled in some form of preschool; while seven out of every 10 were enrolled in primary school at age six. But we also see that fairly large proportions of children are already in primary grades even at age three and four; and many are still in preschool at age seven and even eight.

As with many estimates at the all-India level, these national trends hide major variations, both across the country as well as at different ages. For example, at age three, national policy recommends that children should be in an ECE programme. Gujarat comes close to meeting the norm, with well over 90 per cent children in some form of preschool, the majority in ICDS Anganwadis. In contrast, in Uttar Pradesh, almost two thirds are not attending anywhere. At age four, almost a quarter of all four-year-olds in Rajasthan are already in primary school, with almost equal proportions in government and private schools. But in Assam, about seven out of 10 children are attending an anganwadi. At age five, nationally, about a third of all children are already in primary school. But in UP, close to two in every 10 children are not enrolled anywhere; and, in Rajasthan over 60 per cent children are in primary school. At age six, although all children are expected to be in primary school, over 40 per cent of all six-year-olds in both Telangana and Assam continue in some form of pre-primary class.

These varied pathways in the early years have major consequences for what children experience and learn along the way. From the perspective of the primary school, children in Class 1 are far from homogenous in terms of age. ASER 2018 data shows that na-

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tionally, more than a quarter of children entering primary school are five years old or younger. Less than 40 per cent are at the mandated age of six years. And a third are seven or older. These age-grade distributions have obvious implications for teaching and learning. A four- or five-year-old child is simply not developmentally ready to handle Class 1 curriculum. From the point of view of a teacher, moreover, teaching the same content to a class with wide variation in students’ age is not a trivial challenge. The requirement that teachers complete the curriculum for a given grade in a given year — and, by extension, that the children master the content being taught — does huge disservice to both.

The outcome in terms of learning is clearly visible. In the elementary school sector, ASER has demonstrated for more than a decade that getting all children into school, while undoubtedly a major achievement, does not by itself ensure that children are able to learn at the expected level. ASER data shows that gaps between what children can do and what is expected of them emerge very early in children’s school trajectories and widen as they move through the system. A quick look at the Class 1 language textbook in any state provides a good indication of what children are expected to do during their very first year in school. But ASER 2018 data shows that even several months into Class 1, nationally more than 40 per cent of children are unable to recognise letters of the alphabet, let alone read words or connected text.

As implementation of the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan rolls out across the country, ASER data on young children suggests that a “one size fits all” solution is unlikely to be successful. While helping children get a head start in the early years is important, it is critical to ensure that all stakeholders — parents, teachers, policymakers and textbook developers — understand that the key words are “quality” and “developmentally appropriate”. The continuum envisaged for the early years curriculum should start from and build on what children bring with them when they enter preschool and school, so that they are able to grow and thrive.

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VIEW FROM THE RIGHT

TONING DOWN DISSENT

AN EDITORIAL IN *Organiser* claims that after thorough investigation, the Delhi Police has filed a chargesheet against the so-called dissenting student voices from the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University with the strong charge of sedition. Whether or not the charge will stick in a court of law, it says, only time will tell. However, it has certainly evoked a debate on the issue of “sedition”.

The editorial adds that in 2011, the Congress-led UPA government, while arresting Anna Hazare for his Lokpal agitation, had claimed that Team Anna comprised “arm-chair fascists, overground Maoists, closet anarchists... lurking behind forces of right reaction and funded by invisible donors whose links may go back a long way abroad”. It also claims that Kapil Sibal was very much a part of the same government, and, he was annoyed with the Anna agitation: “Anna movement was definitely... based on Gandhian methods, while the JNU event was meant to openly support the terrorists hanged after

the judicial verdict”. It also asserts that if, as the chargesheet suggests, the event was organised on the occasion of the anniversary of Afzal Guru’s hanging — which was also evident from the protests later held at Jantar Mantar — then, whether this act can be considered just as a criticism of the present government is the key question before the court.

“If the agitators have conviction about their ‘Azadi slogans’ and the organisation of the event called ‘Cultural Evening’ against what they called the ‘Judicial killing of Afzal Guru’, then they must stand up like Mahatma Gandhi and face the penalty as per the Constitution,” the editorial claims. It further says that the reality is, neither the students nor their real masters in and outside the campus believe in Gandhi or Ambedkar. “They believe in Marxist Jihadism, the same mindset that criticised both Gandhi and Ambedkar when they were alive, and they are now using them to further their anti-Bharat, violent ideology. This hypocrisy is seditious and no sane voice would stand by the same,” it states.

CRISIS DOWN SOUTH

ON THE RECENT political crisis in Karnataka, an analysis article in *Organiser* says that with hardly a few months in power, the minority JDS government of H D Kumaraswamy was teetering towards another political crisis, as

its disgruntled partner was threatening to plunge the state into chaos. “[The] Congress may have been ‘delighted’ at the ‘lotus wilting’ as the Independents ingratiate themselves back into the Congress fold, leaving the BJP in the lurch. Still, it is clear that all is not well with the Kumaraswamy government,” the article claims. It further says that the state’s political drama seems a lot like a prelude to the general elections. “For instance, BJP wants to show that the mahagadbandhan, be it at a regional level or national level, is bound to collapse. Similarly, by hook or crook, Congress wants to ensure that 2019 isn’t easy for PM Modi. So the unholy alliance will continue till the Lok Sabha polls,” the article asserts. It adds that Karnataka politics suffered a crisis as seat-sharing talks for 2019 began between the JDS and Congress. “Congress pressurised Kumaraswamy to implement their manifesto — loan waiver to farmers. Only 800 farmers’ loans were waived. PM Modi criticised the Congress-JDS coalition for failing to implement its election manifesto. When irritations begun to surface, obviously the Congress lost foothold. Siddaramaiah played his cards well. His son becoming chief minister revived the dream of father H D Deve Gowda of becoming the Prime Minister yet again. This is another major headache for the Congress,” the analysis article reads.

It adds that whatever is happening is not

politics based on ideological issues, but on lust for power and competition for the caste and religion-based vote banks. The two dominant castes — Lingayats and Vokkaligas in Karnataka — encouraged by political coercion, also play district-level politics.

POLITICS AND FARMERS

AN ARTICLE IN *Organiser* on farmer distress and loan waivers suggests an urgent, holistic review of agricultural policies. It states that if the politics over farm loan waivers is not stopped, then the economy of the country will be crippled. These remarks in the RSS mouthpiece came a few days after the new Congress-led governments in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh promptly announced farm loan waivers.

The article claims that the government must set up either a Parliamentary Committee or an Experts Commission to undertake a de novo holistic review on “farm loan waivers” based on criteria and conditions specific to each region and category of farmers. It further suggests that all political parties must stop indulging in popular but economy-sapping “farm loan waivers” and “farmer” distress “as part of their desperate vote bank politics.”

(compiled by Lalmani Verma)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

APATHETIC BJP

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Misreading Northeast’ (IE, January 22). Cometh the elections, cometh the populist agendas. The Citizenship (amendment) Bill is nothing but a political gimmick used by the BJP to consolidate its traditional votebank. The ruling party has been totally apathetic to local sensitivities. The ethnic sovereignty of the entire Assam region has been jeopardised because of this bill. The Centre needs to listen to the dissenting voices. The framers of our Constitution would never have imagined granting citizenship on a religious basis.

Apurva Singh, Hyderabad

LEADERS GALORE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Question of answers’ (IE, January 22). The Mahagathabandhan seems to lack clarity on fundamental issues such as who will spearhead the movement to stall the Modi-Shah electoral juggernaut in 2019. As the date nears for the general election, one can foretell confusion and conflict emerging with many regional leaders rushing to forge a combined unity. It is also likely that the Congress, keeping to its dynastic practice, could push forward Rahul Gandhi.

HR Bapu, via email

HEARTS AND MINDS

THIS REFERS TO the article ‘The afterlife

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to [editpage@expressindia.com](mailto:editpage@expressindia.com) or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

of Section 377 (IE, January 22). Does liberal law translate into liberal society? This was not the case when Section 377 was decriminalised. The main struggle for LGBT people is social acceptance. The social mindset needs to be changed before LGBT community can freely exercise their “right to love”. We don’t need thousands of laws but one law and a thousand ways to implement it.

Divya Singla, Patiala