# Men and Open Defecation

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# 1. Introduction

In rural India, men defecate in the open more than women even when they have access to a functional toilet. In comparison to using low cost pit latrines, open defecation (OD) is perceived to be promoting purity and strength, particularly by men, who are mostly the chief wage earners and decision makers on how money should be spent in the household[1]. Several studies have found that there is a clear gender gap in toilet usage.

In a study conducted across 11 districts in Punjab, 55 percent of rural men used a toilet as compared to 83 percent of women[2]. In Haryana, as part of citizen feedback exercise on SBM (G) 37 groups of men and women gave a much lower scoring to toilet usage by men as compared to the scores given to toilet usage among women when asked about their feedback on toilet usage in their respective villages[3].

In Bihar, a consumer research study found that 9 out 10 non-users of a toilet within a household were men and some reasons for non-usage of toilet by men included incomplete construction of the toilet; toilet being too small; and toilets are meant for use by women and children; and pits will fill up faster[4]. Moreover, according to the Sanitation Quality Use Access and Trends (SQUAT) survey conducted by the Research Institute of Compassionate Economics (RICE) in rural villages of Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, UP and Rajasthan, over 40 percent of households with a working toilet have at least one member that defecates in the open.[5] A more recent study conducted in Uttar Pradesh (UP)[6] suggests that among households with a functional toilet, men are less likely to be regular users (Table 1).

**Table 1: Toilet usage among men and women in rural Uttar Pradesh**

| Men | | | | | Women | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | OD% | Irregular users% | Regular users% | | Total | OD% | Irregular Users % | Regular Users % |
| **Elderly Men** | 440 | 10 | 17 | 75 | **Elderly women** | 459 | 7 | 11 | 82 |
| **Men** | 2595 | 9 | 20 | 71 | **Women** | 2223 | 5 | 9 | 86 |
| **Boys** | 1345 | 6 | 19 | 75 | **Girls** | 1076 | 3 | 8 | 89 |
| **Total** | **4380** | **8** | **19** | **73** | **Total** | **3758** | **5** | **9** | **86** |

[1] Coffey et al., 2016. "Understanding open defecation in rural India: Untouchability, pollution and latrine pits." Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.52 Issue No.1

[2] WSP, 2014. "Sustainability Assessment of Punjab Rural Water and Sanitation Project." (unpublished)

[3] The World Bank, 2017. "Citizen Engagement Feed Back Pilot Study in Haryana: Findings from 5 Districts, Haryana." (unpublished)

[4] WSP, 2012." Consumer Research Study in Bihar."

[5] RICE Institute, 2014. "SQUAT Research Brief No.1"

[6] WSP, 2016. "Uttar Pradesh Consumer Research Study"

This report is based on a current rapid review that focuses on open defecation particularly among men and possible practical solutions in addressing the issue.

## 2. Methodology

The report is based on a review of studies, both published and unpublished, field visits and interactions with groups of men and women, youth leaders, motivators, telephonic interviews with SBM (G) project staff, and interactions with organizations that are currently engaged in sanitation sector. Information on best practices was also sought from former colleagues and contacts from the World Bank, UNICEF and Project Concern International. Field visits were conducted in two states in northern India- a recently declared ODF state Haryana and a non-ODF state –Bihar. Within Haryana, two districts -Nuh, a minority community dominated district and Gurgaon were visited. Conversations and discussions were possible were recorded with prior permission and informed consent of the participants in the discussions. Information was sought through informal meetings with women and men. Conversations were recorded where possible with informed consent. It should be noted that northern states may differ from southern states in terms of toilet coverage and usage.

## 3. Key Insights

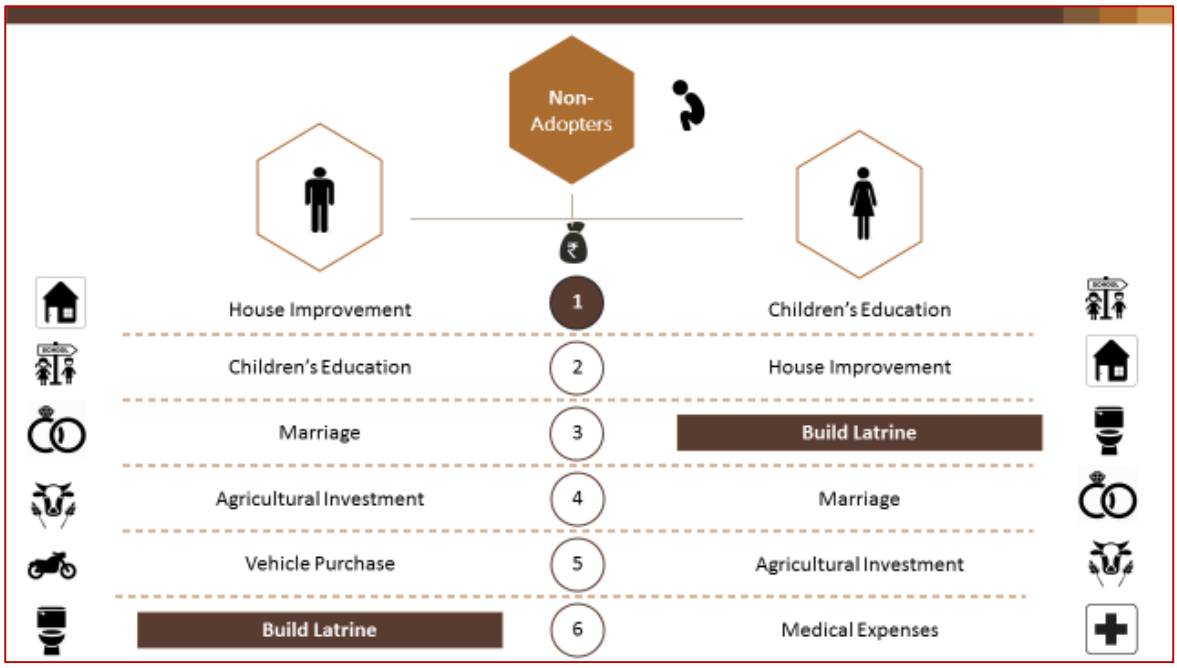
### 3.1 Gender dynamics and sanitation behaviours

Women find toilets to be safe, convenient to use at nights and during menstruation. Women face several difficulties when they have to defecate in the open. In the absence of toilets, women often have to hold out and wait for a female relative to accompany them to defecate in the open. Disposal of sanitary pads and changing during menstruation is extremely embarrassing and difficult for women in the absence of a toilet. They are always fearful that men may see them and face constant stress of finding a safe, yet secluded spot for OD[7].

For men on the other hand toilet construction is not a priority for their own use and decisions regarding investing in the construction of a toilet are largely taken by them based on financial considerations rather than safety needs of women in the household. For instance in Bihar, men pointed out that they would construct a toilet only when they are either constructing a new house or revamping their existing house. Similarly, findings from a consumer research study in Uttar Pradesh clearly show that among those who do not have a toilet or non-adopters of a latrine, construction of a latrine is given higher priority by women as compared to men.

[7] The World Bank, 2017. "Gender analysis of Rural Water and Sanitation projects in Punjab and Kerala" (unpublished)

**Figure 1: Difference in competing priorities between men and women, rural UP**




*Source: WSP, 2016. Uttar Pradesh Consumer Research Study*

Men who are usually the chief wage earners decide when and where toilets are to be constructed, and women are hardly consulted. In such situations, women often defecate in the open due to the lack of choice or use unsafe and unsanitary toilets. For instance in certain regions of Punjab such as Bhatinda, a majority of households (over 90%) use unsafe latrines or "Dhamaka" or "Kui" borehole toilets, which are relatively inexpensive and may cost around Rs.200-500[8]. It was interesting to find that while women did not complain about the dhamaka toilets, adolescent girls pointed out that these toilets were unhygienic, smelly, and attracted cockroaches and flies and were prone to getting inundated during monsoons. In fact, one of the project functionaries in the Bhatinda district mentioned that women 'preferred' and found dhamaka toilets convenient to dispose of sanitary pads[9].

Women generally lack the negotiation capacity to demand a toilet as most financial decisions are made by the male members usually either the husband or a father-in-law.

"I go only once a day, early in the morning with my mother- in -law to the fields. My parental house has a toilet, mine is a love marriage, but I haven't been able to ask my husband for a toilet"-young mother, Amritsar. Men are less likely to find open defecation inconvenient except during monsoons or when they fall sick.

[8] A Dhamaka latrine is a borehole toilet. A pit of 2-3 feet in diameter and depth of 20-30 feet is dug. The pit is covered with a stone slap which is available locally with a squatting hole of 3-4 inches in diameter. The pit is not lined and the squatting slab has no pan or trap. Dhamaka toilets are relatively less expensive. Also see S.Mapuskar, 2011. Dhamaka Latrines in Rajasthan, India. https://issuu.com/svmapuskar/docs/dham

[9] The World Bank, 2017. "Gender analysis of Rural Water and Sanitation projects in Punjab and Kerala" (unpublished)

**Table 2: Perceptions on OD across age group cohorts**

| COHORT | Male Adolescents | Female Adolescents | Chief Wage Earner 18-25 years | Chief Wage Earner 26-45 years | Mothers 18-25 years | Mothers 26-45 years |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceptions on OD | No particular difficulties with OD except for during Rains and to protect against insect bites | • Concerns of sexual assault, privacy and insect bites | • Inconvenience for the elderly and safety of their women folk and inconvenience during rains and perception of filthiness | • Dignity of their women folk at stake, inconvenience during rains and perception of filthiness | • Lack of Privacy, habit in their own village | • Dignity and safety of the daughters/ daughter-in-law and inconvenience during rains and perception of filthiness |

*Source: WSP, 2016. Uttar Pradesh Consumer Research Study*

### 3.2 Why do men prefer OD to using a functional toilet?

Men, particularly the elderly may prefer to defecate in the open out of habit. The habit of stepping out to defecate in the open every morning is perceived as healthy, a chance to breathe fresh air and exercise or to get "oxygen".

"Project staff and motivators should be allowed to reprimand those who persist on going for OD despite our telling them not to…elderly men are adamant …it is like smoking –a habit."-Divisional Coordinator, Nawan Shahr, Punjab

Toilet usage is also closely tied to clear gender roles in habitual, daily routines- men work in the fields, while women do household chores. This role clarity means that men reportedly find it more acceptable to do OD while tending to their fields in the mornings, while women use toilets in the house. Men are less concerned or inconvenienced by lack of privacy or shame.

*Discussion with men, Bihar*

“In our village men sit down to defecate in vegetable patches even if there are no standing crops! When we object, they get angry and retort where else do we sit?”- Female cluster coordinator, Bihar.

Studies in Bihar, Rajasthan and Punjab found that men also hold the perception that toilets are meant more for women, girls, aged and physically challenged. In Punjab one of the district officials opined that toilets really benefit women more than men as the former find it shameful and extremely embarrassed if seen by others defecating in the open , whereas men do not have to worry about such issues.

“In our village almost 80 % of people go out to defecate in the open. Open defecation will end when availability of land to defecate falls short due to increasing construction and people are forced to construct toilets. Such a situation will come in about 10 years!” Elderly male, Bihar.

There is a general notion among both men and women that leach pit toilets are kuccha structures, fill faster, particularly when used regularly by all household members. Consequently, households that have leach pit toilets (constructed by the government), men and boys tend to defecate in the open while women use toilets. Men also resort to OD due to the prevailing perception regarding twin pit technology, especially that these fill quickly and need to be often emptied. In large households, men go out to defecate in the open to avoid queuing up for a toilet. Men often rationalise their OD as a chivalrous gesture, as they allow unrestricted access to toilets to women and children, particularly during the morning hours when children are getting ready for school.

Men often rationalize OD as a means to conserve water. “Open defecation requires just a litre of water, but when we use a toilet we need at least 15 litres of water”, reported a man in Hatiya village, Bihar. Sometimes the elderly also do not have a choice but defecate in the open particularly when there are conflicts with other members of the family.

“My daughter-in-law used to repeatedly point out that I don’t know how to use the toilet properly, so to avoid confrontation I have started going out”, said an elderly male resident of Harmansingh Wala, Punjab. Some elderly may opt to defecate in the open particularly when they lack access to a shared toilet within a household due to family conflicts with the younger generation. “The toilet is in my son’s name and he doesn’t allow me or my wife, who has spinal injury, to use it. She has to defecate in the open just across the street”, reported an elderly male resident of Harmansingh Wala, in Bhatinda, Punjab.

### 3.3 Levers that women use to get toilets constructed in their households

In rural areas women are responsible for performing household chores including cooking, washing and collection of water. Women demand toilets to be constructed so they could save time and attend to chores. Safety and concerns over harassment or assault and increasing difficulty in finding open spaces that are secluded are some of the common reasons that women site in convincing their household members in getting a toilet constructed. Toilets are also constructed for the benefit of the elderly or physically challenged household members.

A Self Help Group member from Hatiya village in Bihar refused to stay with her husband until he constructed a toilet in the household.

“…when I got married and came to my in-laws’ home, I found that there was no toilet. I could not defecate in the open. I was so used to going in a toilet at my paternal home. I left my husband for

about a year and returned only after he constructed a toilet!"- Ramvati, SHG member, Hatiya Village Bihar.

One SHG member from a village in Haryana pointed out that it was with a lot of *sangharsh* (struggle) that she could finally convince her husband and other members to invest in a toilet.

Initially my household members were reluctant to construct a toilet as they thought it was very expensive. They would say "go out" or "sit in the fields" It took me a lot of time to convince them. I argued that construction of a simple toilet would cost us at the most 10,000 to 12,000 rupees and it is a onetime investment. But if we defecate in the open, we fall sick and our children fall sick and we end up spending more than 15,000 for medicines and hospitals almost every 6 months. This argument worked." Sunita, SHG member, Nuh, Haryana.

## 3.4 Women focused messaging in SBM (G)

Under SBM (G) all States in India are to achieve ODF status by October 2019. State strategies typically focus on CLTS triggering, formation of *nigrani samiti*s that follow up and monitor open defecation. While triggering efforts do focus on generating awareness on oral faecal contamination routes, the subsequent IEC efforts (either through wall writings or slogans) also underscore the importance of constructing toilets to safeguard women, protect their "ijjat" and ensure their dignity by providing them with toilets. For instance in Darapur Bihar, SHG members of Ajeevika (The national Rural Livelihood Program) are responsible for motivating communities to construct toilets and discourage open defecation. SHG members organised rallies, candle light marches and shouted slogans to end open defecation. The slogans leverage the benefits of having a toilet to ensure women's dignity, honour and respect.

"ghar mein fridge hain, ghar mein TV
Sauch ko jaati hai biwi"
There is a fridge and TV in the house
But the wife still goes out to defecate

"Gaon mein jab hota andhiyara
Mahile dekhe sadak kinara
When there is darkness in the village
One finds women on the roadside (doing OD)

"Baithi beech sadak par chaachi
Aaya koi uthi hagaasi"
The chaachi(aunt) sits on the road (to defecate)
When someone passes by she has to get up

## 3.5 Mass media efforts to stop male OD

### 3.5.1 Darwaza Bandh Campaign

While there are no state level strategies that exclusively or explicitly try to address the issue of open defecation among men, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) with the support from the World Bank launched the "Darwaza Bandh" Campaign in August 2017. The Campaign includes a series of advertisements with popular movie stars such as Amitabh Bacchan and Anushka Sharma. The advertisements put the spotlight on men going out to defecate and Amitabh Bacchan urging them to use toilets and stop the spread of diseases- Darwaza Bandh Bimari Bandh. In one of the advertisements, Anushka Sharma strongly encourages women to stop anyone from defecating in

the open by pointing to a man who is on his way to the fields to defecate. The links to some of the advertisements are given below:

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxqWBbUqx1s
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDX4z-xBO08
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0k9CZPXLjw

**3.5.2 Mobisodes**

The World Bank created 'mobisodes' or short animation films that can be shared and viewed on a mobile. These mobisodes address issues of men and OD and depict men as change agents. The mobisodes are available on the Swacch Sangraha website (http://ss.cnkonline.com) that was created by MDWS with support from the World Bank.

## 3.6 Local efforts to stop OD that include men and women

**3.6.1 Swacch Gupt Matadaan or Secret Sanitation Voting**

In Chhattisgarh, IEC messages on toilet construction and usage link health to sanitation rather than to women's dignity and pride. One of the districts in Chhattisgarh-Dhamtari initiated an innovative approach to deter both men and women from resorting to OD. This was also a way to involve and create a sense of ownership and responsibility among communities to monitor and achieve ODF status. Under this approach, ballot boxes are placed at strategic places such as schools, Panchayat Bhavans, Anganwadis within a village.

When a person is observed or noticed by any other community member to be resorting to OD, then that person's name is written on a piece of paper and put in the ballot box by the observer . The Panchayat and *nigrani samiti* members take note of the names that appear in the ballot every week. If a person's name repeats more than 3 times, the *nigrani samiti* members and Sarpanch counsel the person at a Gram Sabha or Panchayat meeting to stop OD. If the name appears again, the Sarpanch and *nigrani samiti* members visit the defaulter's home and issue a warning that he/she should stop OD as such a habit puts the community's health at risk. If for a third time someone votes against the defaulter, then the Panchayat levies a monetary penalty of Rs. 500 and the penalty increases every time the defaulter is caught defecating in the open. This approach has been successful and is now being adopted in other districts of Chhattisgarh.

**3.6.2 Involvement of faith leaders in stopping OD**

About 80% of the population in the Nuh district are Meo Muslims and primarily agriculturalists. In Tauru block of Nuh district, the Maulvis or Imams took a pledge that they would participate in block's efforts to stop OD. Consequently, they would announce in the mosques that they would not perform religious ceremonies or Nikah in those households that did not have toilets or those households that indulged in open defecation. This fear of excommunication and religious ostracism worked as a strong deterrent.

**3.6.3 Use of religious sentiment to stop OD**

In Churu district of Rajasthan, it is a common practice among Hindus to offer dairy products such as butter as "Prasad" or offering to deities. One of the effective ways that was used by the project staff of SBM(G) to deter communities from defecating in the open was to convince people that flies do not distinguish between faeces and food. Flies that sit on faeces could also sit on food including the very butter that is offered to Gods. Sometimes the project staff would place a bowl of butter next to faeces in an OD site and visually show communities how flies from faeces would sit on butter and how God was in fact being offered faeces contaminated butter in temples.

## 3.7 Local level efforts to stop male OD

### 3.7.1 Elderly women stop men from OD

In Kalarpur village of Haryana, a group of elderly women who were a part of the *nigrani samiti* played an active role to monitor and stop OD. They regularly do the rounds in their village early in the morning and in the evenings to ensure nobody goes out in the open to defecate. Since the aged are held in deference and the elderly women do not have to follow the purdah system, they were less inhibited to position themselves at strategic points and to way lay people particularly men who were on their way to defecate in the open. They would embarrass them by insisting on accompanying them or sitting along with them while they defecated.

"Initially people thought I was joking, but I would insist on following them." Elderly woman *nigrani samiti* member, Kalarpur, Haryana.

*Elderly women nigrani samiti members, Kalarpur, Haryana*

In some cases they would take selfies along with the defaulters and share the pictures with the Sarpanch who in turn would share the pictures with the District officials on a WhatsApp group. This put a sense fear, shame and embarrassment ultimately deterring the defaulters from resorting to OD.

"You have to use a bit of hasee mazak (humour) and coax people to use toilets and not get into fights. That's what works!" Mahavir, elderly woman *nigrani samiti* member, Kalarpur on being asked what really works as a strategy to stop OD.

### 3.7.2 Leaving open defecators far away at a considerable distance from the village

In Rathiwas village of Haryana, *nigrani samiti* members along with the Sarpanch would catch men who were on their way to defecate in the open and drive them to a considerable distance from the village and leave them as penalty for indulging in OD. At times they would take them to a nearby

police station and leave them there. This put immense fear of being arrested or imprisoned. The Sarpanch confiscated ration cards and Aadhar cards of those who resisted using toilets[10].

**3.7.3 Linking toilet usage to life expectancy**

In Churu district of Rajasthan, district resource groups (DRGs) in charge of motivating communities to use toilets have come up with a very fool-proof rationale to convince elderly men to use toilets. Elderly men habituated to OD often rationalize their habit by saying that they are healthy and strong despite not using toilets

"…they say we can out race you or come for a Kushti fight (wrestling match) we can defeat you hands down."-Shyamlal, District Project Coordinator, Churu.

To this the DRG members question the elderly on how many of their siblings survived beyond childhood? When the elderly men reply that only a few, say four or six survived out of ten siblings, the motivators explain that the reason why their siblings did not survive was due to the fact that nobody in their family had used a toilet. They further explain that survival and longevity are closely connected to hygienic and disease free surroundings which are only possible when there is zero open defecation in the entire village.

**3.7.4 Offering open defecators vermillion and flowers and levying monetary penalties**

In Telangana, a new campaign has been launched with the tag line "undamma bottu pedata" based on the title of a popular Telugu movie. Under this Campaign, nigrani samiti members put vermillion (bottu) on the foreheads of those who are caught defecating in the open. Motivators and nigrani samiti members explain the health benefits of having a toilet and how better health outcomes particularly for children can be achieved when everyone in the community uses a toilet.
For those that resort to OD despite having a working toilet, the samiti members put garlands and offer flowers and take photographs which are shared with district officials.

*Flowers being offered by nigrani samiti members to a person caught resorting to OD, Telangana*

[10] While this mode of deterrence may be effective, such practices are incompatible with human rights and may attract criticism from a human rights perspective

Further, *nigrani* committee members also visit those households that could afford a toilet but are reluctant to invest in one and put vermillion and offer flowers to the household members. This puts a lot of social pressure and deters people from defecating in the open. For those who are very difficult to convince monetary penalties are also sometimes imposed. An IEC officer for SBM(G) Telangana, explained that the usual spin of women's dignity and their *ijjat* being affected by lack of toilets does not galvanize communities into constructing toilets in Telangana as it does in Northern states. Instead, what works is monetary penalties or anything linked with money along with intense social pressure. Moreover, he further opined that wall writings, hoardings or distribution of pamphlets do not have an impact as people get inured to the written messages over a period of time.

**3.7.5 Youth clubs taking the lead to convince the elderly men**

In Fazilpur Badli village of Gurgaon district of Haryana, youth clubs comprising young men and women have taken the lead to convince elderly men to use toilets. Fazilpur Badli is a progressive village with nearly 100 percent toilet coverage. However, the elderly initially preferred OD to using toilets. This group of open defecators posed a serious challenge for the village to be declared ODF. The youth club members identified those elderly who defecated in the open in their weekly meetings and took the younger generatio in their families into confidence. The younger generation usually grandchildren would then convince their grandfathers to stop open defecation and use toilets.

"If someone from the Club tried convincing an elderly person to use a toilet, he would get offended, but his own grandchildren insisted on him using a toilet…that worked."- President Youth Club, Fazilpur Badli, Haryana

## 4. Conclusion and recommendations

It is an established fact that men tend to resort to more OD as compared to women, and often rationalize this behavior. Because states have been set tough sanitation targets to achieve by 2019, the current IEC strategy promoted actively by government agencies focuses on toilets being beneficial for women's safety and *izzat*, or honour (particularly in patriarchal Northern India), and to protect women's pride and dignity. Even the popular box office hit, *Toilet Ek Prem Katha*, exclusively focuses on the inconveniences suffered by women in the absence of a toilet. It fails to showcase what problems the community will face or faces when men continue to defecate in the open. It is in the subtext of the movie that open defecation is accepted and a non-issue for men as the male protagonist in the film is not shown going through the same struggle and turmoil of finding a decent toilet to defecate after holding out for almost a day as the female protagonist! Such messaging overshadows the emphasis on consistent toilet usage for all, including men, for better health outcomes for all.

An effort has been made to counter the patriarchal messaging in April 2017. In a set of guidelines sent to the states, the Centre had asked them to be gender inclusive in their IEC messaging under SBM (G). It stated that while behaviour change messaging around shame and dignity of women may be useful as entry point strategy, it carry risks of lack of ownership by men and the reinforcing of gender stereotypes. The guideline stresses that the campaign messaging should be gender sensitive and targeted at both men and women. While it can be argued that there are no systematic efforts at scale in IEC messaging that emphasize the need for men also to use toilets, the guidelines were a formal acknowledgement of the issue that riddles the campaign, and that is a good start.

It is clear that there are successful actions that can be taken to deter men from OD but they vary by region – for instance, the 'Gandhigiri' approach of Telengana may not work as effectively as a deterrent in North India, where OD is quite acceptable, especially among men. However, some approaches may find resonance across regions – for instance, the monitoring undertaken by elderly women, who are generally respected across cultures and regions, has a high potential to deter men from OD. These are just a few examples; a country as diverse as India may already have small-scale solutions or measures being practiced but those that may not have been reported or documented. Notwithstanding the variations, there is need to actively search, collect, learn and rapidly share the field-tested actions surrounding this issue with implementers to further strengthen the guidelines with actionable inputs into behaviour change programming.

Sector practitioners and implementers may be brought together to generate solutions through research and trials to inform the the programme. More often than not, solutions are simple. The SBM-G campaign communicates a series of pertinent messages to communities. These may be further layered with additional messages that reinforce the need for consistent usage. For example, men feel that the leach pits fill up quickly and it is leads them to opt for OD to delay the filling up of pits. While discussing toilet technologies, its features and costs, it becomes imperative to explicitly communicate that in the case of a twin leach pit, the usage by all family members including men does not accelerate filling up. On the contrary, the volume and the number of the pits factor in regular usage and longevity.

A systematic communication effort is needed to involve men as change agents to achieve and sustain ODF status in rural communities. Field programming can be adapted and studies can be designed to inquire into areas including community as well as intra-household settings, such as how men can influence other men, who within a household can influence younger or older men, effectiveness of emotional as compared to rational messages on men to deal with the specific issue, and so on.