Districts across the country are coming up with innovative activities to bring about behaviour change among people, motivate them to build and use toilets and to ensure sustainability of the practice. Lohardaga district in Jharkhand advanced the act of giving gifts during Christmas by over a month, in celebration of homes having toilets and promoting their usage.

Surprised people in Jory village opened their doors to unexpected gifts from none other than Santa Claus himself, dressed in a classic red suit and hat, sporting a fluffy white beard. He came bearing gifts of sarees, blankets and other gift items.

Commenting on this initiative, Deputy Commissioner of Lohardaga, Mr. Binod Kumar said, “The season of Christmas and World Toilet Day was another opportunity for us to motivate people to use toilets.”

Ever since Lohardaga district was declared ODF on 15th August 2017, the district administration has carried out rigorous IEC/BCC activities for behaviour change. Further, they figured that religion plays a major role in Indian society in influencing lives and behaviour; in addition to social, psychological and educational factors. So they did not want miss out any festival be it Diwali, Chatt Puja, Dussera, Muhharam, Sarhul or Karma; to use the occasion to carry out activities to motivate the community.
The district administration also realized that behaviour change is not so simple. Even though as many as 59,573 toilets were constructed under the Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin (SBMG) campaign in all the 66 panchayats, they found that a large section of the rural population continued to defecate in the open, despite having toilets at home.

“We attributed the problem to people’s refusal to let go of their old habits. Realising the need to bring about behavioural change I came up with this idea of sending 66 Santa Clauses to all the 66 panchayats of the district to motivate people to use toilets,” the DC added.

After a month of planning and preparation, on the morning of 19th November 2017, 66 Santa Clauses along with frontline sanitation workers were sent out to spread the message of cleanliness and hygiene and reward those who had stopped defecating in the open. Sanitation workers are at the forefront of SBM and it was based on their feedback that the families to be rewarded were chosen.

“I wanted to convert the opportunity of ‘Christmas knocking at their doors’ into something fruitful in terms of eliminating open defecation,” the Deputy Commissioner explained.

Majority of the population in Lohardaga district belong to tribal communities and a majority of them are Christians. Since Santa Claus is considered to be a messenger for good luck, fortune and blessings, people were delighted to receive such a blessing from Santa.

The main idea behind the gesture of giving gifts to those who were using toilets was to motivate others to do the same, so they too can receive gifts. The DC further said that religion based motivations were effective and often had positive results. Through this activity the district hopes to move a step closer towards meeting the objectives of SBM. This activity will be carried out until till 25th December 2017.
Challenges:
The district’s ODF journey has had its share of challenges. Considering the topography of the region with plenty of open spaces, forests and scattered households, open defecation was practiced widely. In the remote blocks that were inhabited by native tribes, accessibility was an issue. Further, in the absence of television coverage, propagating the harmful effects of open defecation was a big challenge.

Strategies:
In such areas, the district officials used folk media such as nukkad nataak to communicate with the people the harmful effects of open defecation. Further, women from SHGs, Anganwadi sewikas and sahayaka have been involved in the awareness campaigns. In many villages, such motivators resided with the community to motivate people to use toilets. This resulted in reducing OD to a large extent.

Response of the community:
Fortunately, the response from the community has been quite positive from the beginning. Even in Naxalite prone areas of the district, there was no problem during construction of toilets.

The biggest success of the programme was that every community and every individual accepted and understood the need and significance of having a toilet. Tremendous efforts were made to involve every member of the community in the SBM campaign to end open defecation, including women, school children, PRI members and various religious leaders.

Toilets constructed:
To make the district ODF, as many as 2145 toilets were construction in 2014-15; 11005 in 2015-16; 51717 in 2016-17 and 59573 in 2017-18.

Sustainability:
The impact of all the IEC/BCC campaigns carried out by the district will be seen from next year onwards, according to the DC. In the meantime, they plan to conduct an internal survey to record the incidences of reduction in OD; although they plan to continue with their triggering and motivational exercises until the practice of OD is completely eliminated.

The district also has 3276 SHGs which have been actively involved in construction of toilets. Having almost completed that job, they are now being involved in mobilizing people to end open defecation; as also the Aanganwadi workers, ANMs and PRIs in spreading of awareness to end open defecation.