Open Defecation Free Attappady

Attappady is a tribal development block established in 1962 in Palakkad district of Kerala State. It is located to east of the silent valley in Western Ghats, one of the world’s most famous biodiversity hotspots. Despite having many schemes and programmes under tribal development, the block had little access to safe and improved sanitation facilities. Through Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), by building 4674 new toilets, the district administration achieved ODF status in the block. By constructing the highest number of toilets in Attappady, the State could declare ODF on November 01, 2016. In the initial stage, the Mission was perceived as challenging considering the unique terrain of the area and geographical isolation. District administration took it as challenge and made this possible within the stipulated time period.

Role of district administration
The proactive role played by the district administration made this daunting task possible. Weekly review meeting by the District collector, and the intervention of District collector and Sub-collector was very instrumental in achieving the ODF status. Convergence of various departments (revenue, forest, tribal development, rural development, local self-government, etc.) were made to overcome various operational challenges at local levels.
Role of Local Self Government

Grama Panchayaths under the block (Sholayar, Agali, and Puthoor) played a crucial role in completing the projects on time. Considering a special area, district Panchayath sanctioned an additional amount of Rs. 10000/- to each beneficiary over and above the actual amount of Rs. 15400/- to construct a toilet unit.

Participation of Community Based Organization

Suchitwa Mission is the state nodal agency for sanitation, and SBM in Kerala. Funds under SBM were allotted to all the local bodies on time. Kudumbashree, a community network that works with LSGs for poverty eradication and women empowerment also played a crucial role in community mobilization. Most of the SBM beneficiaries of Attapady Block belonged to Kudumbashree. Hence, the district administration used this network to reach out to the beneficiaries. They also joined hands with Suchitwa Mission to train women in the construction of toilets and IEC activities in Attapady Block. National Rural Livelihood Mission had also given training to youth in toilet construction as to avoid the interference of private contractors. NGO (Shanti Gramam) working in the field of sanitation, especially focusing on schools by making toilet complexes and Pink toilets also contributed to the efforts

IEC activities

Majority of the beneficiaries in Attapady were tribal, having no knowledge of using modern toilets. Recognizing the need for behavioural change, a comprehensive IEC campaign was carried out. As part of IEC, special hamlet gatherings and special GramaSabhas, and special meetings of beneficiaries were conducted. House visits by SwachhGrahis, people’s representatives, Tribal Promoters, Social Workers, and Village Extension Officers, students etc. were also carried out. The service of neighborhood groups of Kudumbashree were utilized for continuous interpersonal communication to make community aware about the ill effects of open defecation.
**Special initiatives**

Considering the geographical peculiarity of the area, few special initiatives were implemented. Local people from the community trained by Kudumbashree and NRLM worked as skilled laborers in the construction process. In some places, low cost construction methods using indigenous materials such as bamboo reinforced with mud were used in toilet construction. To overcome the issue of insufficient land area in a few tribal hamlets, community toilets were constructed, and in some places common pits were made for multiple households. To address the shortage of construction materials, LSGs and community leaders facilitated direct supply of readymade materials and linked the beneficiaries with markets.
Conclusion

Initiating SBM in Attapady was a daunting task both for the district administration and Suchitwa Mission (Nodal agency for sanitation and SBM) because of multiple reasons. The unique topography of the areas, lack of transportation facilities due to geographical isolation, lack of knowledge on use of toilets, insufficient land area in tribal hamlets,
and lack of construction materials were a few among them. By overcoming all these challenges, the will of district administration and collective participation of local community made this a success. During the stipulated time period, under SBM, 4674 new toilets were built in this Block Panchayath. An area which faces severe malnutrition and high infant mortality rates, this achievement of ODF is momentous as it impacts tremendously on malnutrition and health of the tribal population.

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