

FIELD NOTE

After every visit to the rural areas of our state, I come back with a mixed feeling. The feeling is a mixture of pessimism and optimism. Some time back I visited a village in one of the coastal districts, and met the villagers, the entrepreneur, who has set up a Production Centre for toilet materials, and the field staff of RWSS. The Production Centre is managed by a young person of the same village. He appeared enthusiastic about Total Sanitation Campaign. But the quality of the materials produced at the Production Centre was not up to the mark. Pans made of cement, which are discouraged by the State Mission, were being produced at this centre and these did not conform to specifications. The person in charge of the centre did not know what a *rural pan* was. What was more distressing was that even the Junior Engineer and the Assistant Engineer of RWSS did not know it and the reason for which rural pans should be promoted under the Total Sanitation Campaign. That design options should be given to people, out of which they can choose one, was not known to the production centre-in-charge and the motivators, i.e. the staff of RWSS.

On the other hand, when I spoke to the villagers about different designs of IHLs, they took keen interest in the subject and the choice of the people was clearly in favour of offset pit even though this costs a little more. It was very clear from the interaction with the villagers that once the benefit of using toilets was convincingly put across, they would not mind using their resources for the construction of toilets. I have had similar experiences in most of the villages I visited in the last few months. I am convinced that people would come forward to install their household toilets and use them, provided the benefit of such a move was clearly explained to them.

The above experience proves two points:

First, interpersonal communication has to be a very important element in the Total Sanitation Campaign.

Second, one should not go to people with any pre-conceived notion about any particular design or cost of the toilet. Rather, if all the agencies involved in the

campaign go to people with a desire to talk to them and learn from them, an excellent rapport can be established, and more often than not, people would be convinced about the benefit of using toilets and stopping open defecation.

We should have no doubt that rural people are rational and if they have not done something which appears commonplace to us, it means nobody has discussed the subject with them in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Sometimes, mere inertia prevents people from taking decisions, which have a vital bearing on their health and well-being. Construction and use of toilet is one such thing and TSC is meant to break this inertia. Under no circumstances, TSC should be seen as a target-oriented programme. At the same time it should be very clearly understood that it is being implemented in a mission mode and we have a vision of achieving a "Clean Orissa" by stopping open defecation altogether within a period of about four years.

The experience of the visit to districts also points to the fact that more training is required for our field staff, extension agencies, NGO workers and others. Training has a vital role in human resource development and in giving the right orientation to motivators. The State Water and Sanitation Mission and the Communication & Capacity Development Unit functioning under the mission have drawn up an ambitious programme for training the personnel who are supposed to provide leadership to the campaign at the district and block levels. What is of equal importance is that we spend time with field functionaries whenever possible, hold dialogues with them and try to get their doubts and misconceptions cleared at every possible opportunity. It is only through a strong and inspired cadre of personnel at various levels that TSC as well as many other social sector interventions can be carried out effectively.

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"We shall not finally defeat AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, or any of the other infectious diseases that plague the developing world until we have also won the battle for safe drinking water, sanitation and basic health."



Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General