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EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE WASH SERVICES:
FUTURE CHALLENGES IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

Swachh Bharat Mission: Case of Visakhapatnam City

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Swachh Bharat Mission

The Government of India (GoI) launched the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) or Clean India Mission in 2014 with the ambitious aim to ensure hygiene, waste management and sanitation across the nation by the 150th anniversary of birth of Mahatma Gandhi on 2nd October 2019.

Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC)

The Ministry of Urban Development accorded Program ‘Capacity Building for Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (U): Technical Support to USAID-GoI Knowledge partnership’ was led by WSUP (Water and Sanitation for Urban Poor) Advisory India to support 4041 statutory towns for a period of three years viz. 2015-18, with GVMC being the pilot city for strategic implementation. Visakhapatnam city (Vizag) located on the east coast of India, is a city of over 2 million people and the largest in Andhra Pradesh state.

The economically weaker section of the society emerged as the focal point across 779 slums housing a population of 0.8 million in all 72 Wards of the city. The State and local government being at the helm of affairs provided a conducive environment to implement the strategic and penetrating **Ward-by-Ward approach** which became central to Visakhapatnam improving its levels of sanitation and health and catapulting to become the 3rd cleanest city from 44th.

Ward-by-Ward approach

Critical to addressing the first step of the full sanitation value chain is continuous availability and access to toilets for all. Vizag city had 204 open defecation (OD) spots reporting anything between 50 to 1500 open defecators (ODers) per Ward as per the citywide sanitation mapping survey undertaken at the onset of the Program term. They were slum dwellers, day migrants, truckers, labourers or informal market users ODing for various reasons such as lack of toilets at home, inadequate or poorly maintained community toilets (CT) and public toilets (PT), lack of water supply or electricity, safety or habit. The GVMC is the implementation authority for provisioning Individual Household Toilets (IHHT) and CTs and PTs. Now for GVMC to demonstrate positive results in SBM in a short time span required a strategy that would be central to providing equal opportunity, access and participation across the most vulnerable socio-economic strata.

The **Ward-by-Ward** strategy is fundamental to Vizag’s success story. By disaggregating OD data using a ward-by-ward approach - moving from meta (city) to meso (ward), the task of achieving citywide ODF status was made more manageable than if the city were tackled as one unit. The Wards reporting low levels of OD were targeted first and made OD free, setting an example for other Wards to follow suit. An inter-Ward competition was conducted to incentivize and recognize the efforts of the stakeholders. The Ward Sanitation (WSC) committee comprising of members of the locality especially women SHG became the basic block for grassroots institution sustenance and helped identify the last mile beneficiaries of the Program. Action plans were devised using the Ward ODF Plan which documented the progress and identified gaps. Each Ward was equipped with a Micro-Planning Workbook which is a simple practical toolkit for WSC members to enumerate individual households’ sanitation data like availability of toilet, water, usage of toilet by all members,

connection to sewer or on-site facility etc. and identify gaps to be consequently addressed by the service provider, in this case GVMC. GVMC constructed 13,999 IHHTs and 153 CTs and PTs (197 existing). To address the issue of gender-specific requirements, 279 CTs and PTs were retro-fitted by GVMC at an estimated cost of INR 739.65 lakhs. Vizag now had 350 CTs and PTs with an enhanced seating capacity of 4153 (as against 3033). The Commissioner had made CTs free for use to prevent any slippage in ODF status. Additionally, strategic spot-policing by sadhimpu women (sadhimpu means ‘to persuade or knock another person to perform a task’) and a squad of two-wheelers accessorised with a loud speaker and horn warned and scared the last mile OD doers. By first quarter of 2017, Vizag was well capacitated and setting an example of a front runner in achieving OD.

Eliminating OD, also reduced the underlying risk of spread of diseases like dysentery especially in children and containing faecal matter. Around 59% households in Vizag have on-site sanitation facilities and others while 74% septage goes untreated into the environment. The city has 58 private Vacuum Truck Operators (VTOs) providing desludging services to the city. It is a rudimentary on-call process and completely private sector driven. WSUP India prepared a FSSM Policy for GVMC to create a regulatory environment and bring the private VTOs under the aegis of the Corporation. Most VTOs were licensed and were mandated to follow SOPs, utilize proper PPE and dispose only in GVMC authorized disposal sites at the existing STPs. An affordable pricing mechanism was developed to ensure every household utilizes desludging services and does not indulge in manual scavenging in the dark of the night. There was much reluctance and resistance among the VTOs association for being regulated by GVMC. The privately operated CTs and PTs were directed to utilize the VTO desludging services, that was earlier provided free of cost by the Corporation. A business plan was prepared for O&M of all the 350 toilets and an additional 100 planned in the future. By mid of 2018 the Program had successfully addressed the full sanitation value chain and exited at a high note.

The performance of the city slipped several ranks in the annual Swachh Sarvekshan assessment soon after exit. Considering the time limitation of the Program, there was not enough time to establish thorough sustainability. The vacuum left on exit became apparent. The performance curve that was rising suddenly dipped. However, it was transient. The city again sprung back to a commendable 9th position having dipped to 23rd in the previous year. This was testament of the institution that was created by the Program that helped the city sustain itself and will continue doing so in the future.

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Contact details

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