Communication Strategies in Implementing Solid Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) Practices in Rural India with Special Emphasis on Behaviour Change Communication

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Abstract

The concept of Solid Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) assumes great significance in terms of growing demand for sustainable development principles and overall welfare of human beings. The initiatives around SLWM are redefining living patterns in rural spaces across India. In the absence of its proper disposal, these huge dumps of wastes have a tendency to become breeding grounds for various contagious and non-contagious diseases. Lack of hygiene and sanitation practices, clean water and improper disposal of wastes becomes the major contributing factor of the total disease load within any area or region. To tackle this issue public engagement assumes great importance apart from government policies and initiatives. Public participation can be garnered through various measures and mechanisms. Communication plays an upper role in all those initiatives and strategies. It plays a key role in reaching out to public, making them part of multiple public-engagement strategies and sensitizing them about significance of health, hygiene and sanitation and the steps and strategies adopted by the government to achieve this goal. Clear, creative, comprehensible and engaging communication plans, policies and strategies need to be formulated to make related media campaigns specific and relevant. Strengthening Behaviour Change Communication efforts also need to be enhanced to achieve desired results.

Keywords: Behaviour Change Communication, media advocacy campaign, sensitization, communication strategies, public engagements, online communication modes
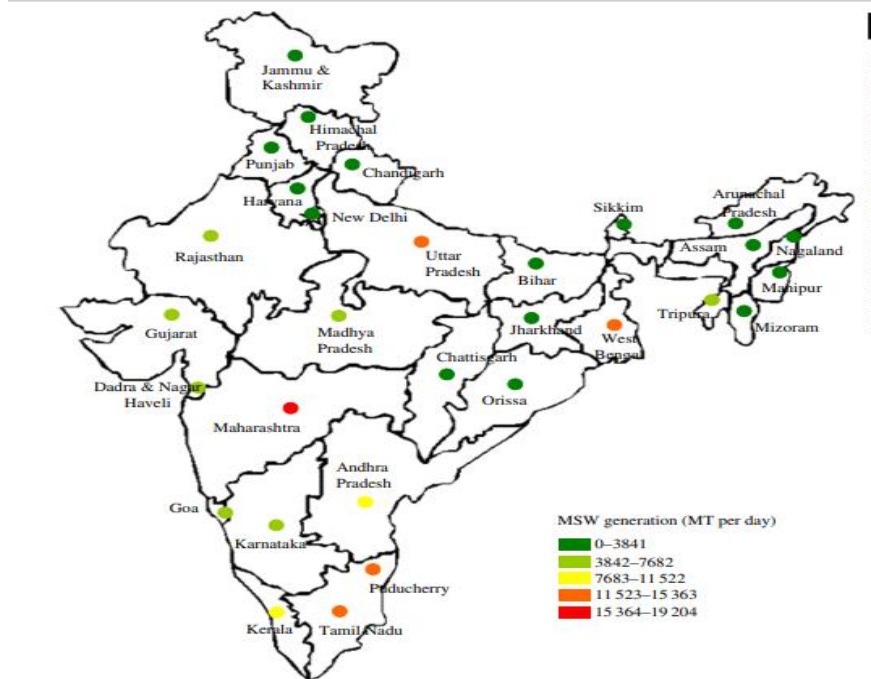
Introduction

Solid Liquid Waste Management (SLWM), one of the core components of Swachh Bharat Mission–Gramin, was launched with a purpose to improve the overall quality of life in rural areas especially in terms of cleanliness and hygiene. To achieve these objectives, participation, ownership and involvement of community at the grassroot level is a pre-requisite. IEC, being one of the essential components of the programme, can focus on individual efforts and community-driven initiatives that would go a long way in bringing about behaviour change in terms of health and hygiene.

SLWM is essentially defined as the collection, transportation, recycling or disposal of waste materials, generally produced as a result of human activities, with the purpose to reduce their effect on human health and overall sustainability of the ecological balance. The flow of solid and liquid wastes, all over the world, has been recently increasing and the same poses a plethora of challenges for the society. The changing composition of solid wastes adds to the problem of disposal. For example, plastics that are non-

degradable and often have harmful combustion properties make up an increasing percentage of solid wastes (Ashalakshmi & Arunachalam, 2010). It is estimated that rural people in India generate liquid waste (grey water) of the order of 15,000 to 18,000 million litres per day and solid waste (organic/recyclable) 0.3 to 0.4 million metric tons per day, respectively (Pasi, 2015).

A report "Solid and Liquid Waste Management for Garhi Harsaru Gram Panchayat" prepared by New Delhi based TARU leading Edge stated that the problem of waste has reached a state of crisis. "Mountains of waste accumulated on wetlands, clouds of smoke from burning it, oceans of waste floating in rivers and canals, all indicate loud and clear: You cannot ignore us anymore! You need to get your act together now!!" the report added. The solid and liquid wastes that remain unattended and untreated hampers the socio-economic and overall development of any human society. Plastic waste and stagnant wastewater are also adversely affecting communities. Government of India's flagship rural sanitation programme, Swachh Bharat Mission - Gramin is a centrally sponsored scheme with the key objectives to provide universal access to toilets and achieve Open Defecation free status.

India is experiencing rapid urbanization while remaining a country with physical, climatic, geographical, ecological, social, cultural and linguistic diversity. Megacities are a relatively recent phenomenon, associated with globalization of economy, culture and technology. These megacities have dynamic economic growth and high waste generation per capita. India generates approximately 133 760 tonnes of municipal solid waste per day, of which approximately 91,152 tonnes is collected and approximately 25, 884 tonnes is treated. Municipal solid waste generation *per capita* in India ranges from approximately 0.17 kg per person per day in small towns to approximately 0.62 kg per person per day in cities. Waste generation rate depends on factors such as population density, economic status, level of commercial activity, culture and city/region (Kumar et-al, 2017).

Figure 1. State-level statistics of MSW generation in India (2009–2012). Source: Central Pollution Control Board, Govt. of India, 2012.

Source: Kumar et-al, 2017

Irregular waste dumping and inadequate waste infrastructure are the major issues related to SLWM and there is lack of responsibility towards waste in the community. There is a need to cultivate community awareness and change the attitude of people towards waste, as this is the first step towards developing proper and sustainable waste management systems. In this context, communication becomes necessary to create public enlightenment and education on SLWM. Communication facilitates positive change to the target audience in terms of improving their living conditions. This is possible when there is "effective mobilization aimed at creating favourable attitudes and behaviours among the people for whom a development project is being executed" (Okunna, 2002).

As communication is an integral part of every human activity, role of communication in SLWM becomes imperative. Communication goes beyond mere sharing of information: It plays an indispensable role in influencing beliefs, views, perceptions and to induce behavioural or attitudinal change. Behavioural change may require consistent and systematic applications or activities to achieve desired goals. This may be achieved through public enlightenment campaign. A campaign "is the planning and coordination of series of consistent activities aimed at achieving a central objective" (Nwabueze (2007). McQuail (2010) defines a campaign as the planned attempt to influence public opinion, behaviour, attitudes and knowledge on behalf of some cause, person, institution or topic, using different media over a specific period of time. These campaigns could be pursued using different media like radio, TV, print and social media. McQuail (2010) argues that the media could be a potent force for public enlightenment and popular education.

Visual representation of any information easily strike through the mind of target audience and make them ponder over the disseminated message. A public campaign with new strategy of visual components could

be more effective in delivering the information related to SLWM. Signs and illustrations could add to it. Posters, billboards, hoardings, pamphlets could be used. Different forms of small media could be effectively used in the targeted areas. Visuals not only help to relate the message but kindle the thought about the message and make people to ponder over the information delivered. Visuals have to be accurate and culturally relevant to ensure the credibility of messages (Shanthi, 2015).

Mass media has a crucial role in generating awareness about waste management. TV shows, documentaries, radio spots or programmes, short films or sponsored programmes can play an effective role in disseminating information about SLWM. Both online and offline content has to be generated to reach out to masses at grassroot level. Folk media can be used; folk artists can be involved and street plays can be arranged to bring in proximity in the related messages. Community Radio can chip in as a powerful communication tool that can be used related to local needs and themes.

Thus, multiple channels of communication and communication strategies can be used to reach the intended audience. Content used through these channels has to be crisp, specific, relevant and meaningful. Brand ambassadors from different fields be it sports, films, music etc. can be roped in for effective spread of the message. Messages could be delivered in local languages. Both interpersonal and group communication techniques can be used. Anganwadi workers, Asha workers, religious leaders, opinion leaders too can be used for the purpose of dissemination of relevant and specific information related to SLWM. The group communication techniques can focus on meetings, discussions with youth, elders, village committees, panchayat members, students, employees and so on. Banners, hoardings, pamphlets can also be used for wareness generation. Pictorial or graphical representation conveys powerful messages and the same could be helpful in this endeavour as well.

Media Advocacy Campaign

Media advocacy can be defined as the process of disseminating policy-related information through various channels of media with the purpose to bring out a desired change. It can be one of the key components for any communication strategy devised to address or reinforce certain messages and bring about behavioural changes at the community level. Advocacy campaigns often employ different media platforms and devise multiple strategies to generate and disseminate the intended messages and increase community sensitization at large. Media, undoubtedly, is recognized as a powerful advocacy tool.

An effective media advocacy campaign in achieving the set objectives of SLWM can revolve around the following key interventions:

All content related to SLWM in terms of discussions, meetings, workshops, seminars or sponsored programmes through different media platforms would help to promote agenda setting and disseminate tailored messages aimed at achieving SLWM aims and objectives.

Community engagement is a pre-requisite for the sustainability of any development programme. Inclusive community approach would go a long way in ensuring their participation and involvement in SLWM practices.

Involving celebrities from diverse fields and opinion leaders would also help in bringing a desired change. They could be roped in for discussing various perspectives related to SLWM practices.

Thus, a combination of these and other interventions can play an effective role in implementing SLWM related practices at the grassroot level. There has to be an effective communication in varying forms

ranging from advocacy, hygiene promotion and behavior change communication, among others. Effective communication can ensure advocacy with planners, policy makers as well as rural masses.

Communication involves not only providing information or messages to the target audiences but also includes mobilizing community action and understanding their issues and concerns. A well-defined communication plan with appropriate objectives, approaches and methods could be mapped out. Communication channels to reach out to specific audiences needs to be identified and explored to lead to desired behaviour change.

Behaviour Change Communication

Broadly speaking, Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) refers to reaching out to a specific audience with certain customized or tailored messages through various channels of communication be it interpersonal, group, mass or social media with the purpose to bring about changes in behavior regarding specific problems and to achieve desired results. It follows a systematic process involving doing research, creating specific messages, planning and implementing different communication strategies and monitoring and evaluation. Focus is also laid on pre-testing and delivery of messages, categorization of audience (specific or general) so as to achieve defined and desired behavioural objectives.

National Health Mission, Government of Kerala defines Behaviour Change Communication as an interactive process of any intervention with individuals, group or community to develop communication strategies to promote positive health behaviours which are appropriate to the current social conditions and thereby help the society to solve their pressing health problems. This is achieved through effective communication strategies and systematic information dissemination through interpersonal communication as well as with the help of print-visual-audio and new age media.

BCC is an interactive and engaging process with communities wherein tailored messages and approaches are designed and developed using a variety of communication channels with the aim to bring desired positive change in their respective behaviours. An effective BCC campaign for behaviour change calls for:

-Doing research and assessment about the audience to be targeted. This will help in understanding their needs to be satisfied and identifying issues to be addressed.

-Design and strategy are the crucial pillars in a BCC programme. They will assist in defining aims and objectives and the ways to achieve them. Messages have to be clear, catchy, creative, specific, direct and audience-centric. Once the BCC messages and other related content has been finalized, pre-testing should be done to check its effectiveness, appeal and relevance. It is also to be ensured that specific audiences are motivated to change their behaviour via these interventions.

-Evaluation should be carried out on the progress being made. This will also help in understanding the targets achieved, lessons learnt and any modifications to be done.

-Feedback from the target audience and other stakeholders holds significance in the entire process. This will help in ensuring that the BCC messages have been well-taken and incorporated in their routine activities thus, laying foundations for new sets of behaviour.

Here it is pertinent to mention that the age of technology is looked as widening the possibilities for changing behaviour. With the growing utilization and influence of technology, people try to adopt new

ways and patterns of learning that in a way has an impact on their behaviour. With the rise in mobile and internet communication, the same is viewed as new and emerging tool for behavioural communication and other interventions. Ring tones can emphasize on intended and tailored BCC messages, short audio-video clips related to BCC messages can be circulated with the purpose to achieve set targets, and so on. Accordingly, rise in smartphone and internet communication is viewed as holding great promise to be utilized in Behaviour Change communication.

Theoretical Framework

Behaviour Change Communication gradually evolved over the years. Certain theories/models aptly describe it as it passes through different stages. An effective BCC strategy calls for a strong theoretical base. Some theories have been discussed here to provide an overview about behaviour change and how it can be incorporated in SLWM process so as to bring about the desired change.

Social Cognitive Theory Model

Social Cognitive Theory by Albert Bandura proposes that behavior is not only driven by self but also by external forces. Also known as reciprocal determinism, social learning theory emphasizes that behaviour, personal factors and environmental factors are all equal, interlocking determinants of each other (Bandura, 1973, 1977).

While environmental factors represent situational influences and environment in which behaviour is performed; personal factors includes instincts, traits and other motivational forces at individual level. Several other constructs underlie the process of human learning and behaviour change and these include self-efficacy, self-control, reinforcements, emotional coping and observational learning. Bandura explains that even if individuals have a strong sense of efficacy they may not perform the behaviour if there is no incentive. This hints towards providing rewards or incentives, apart from other factors, to bring out any behaviour change. Shaping the environment may influence behaviour change and it includes providing opportunities as well as identifying constraints that might hinder the behaviour change.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour is a cognitive theory by Azjen (1985) that proposes that an individual's decision to engage in a specific behaviour can be predicated by their intention to engage in that behaviour. The theory is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975)
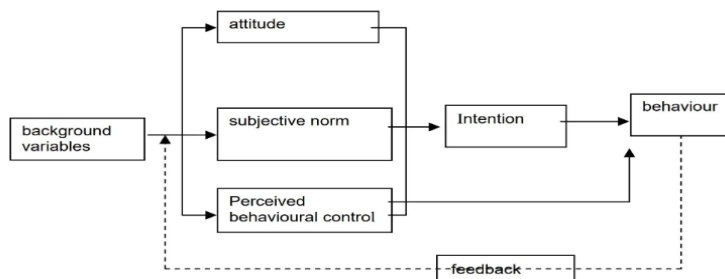

Theory of Planned Behaviour

This theory suggests that the most important determinant of an individual's behaviour is their intention to perform that behaviour and intention is determined by an individual's attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Here, intention has been shown to be the most important variable in predicting behavior change. Information needs to be presented in such a manner that it helps to shape positive attitudes towards the behaviour and emphasizes subjective norms or opinions that support the behaviour.

Transtheoretical (Stages of Change) Model

The Transtheoretical Model (also called the Stages of Change Model) was developed by Prochaska and DiClemente in late 1970s. The model proposes change as a process of six stages: Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, Maintenance and Termination.

While precontemplation is a stage where people do not intend to change in near future (defined as within next six months); contemplation is a stage where they intend to start a healthy behaviour in near future (defined as within next six months). Preparation is a stage where people are ready to take action within the next 30 days. Action is a stage where they make the behaviour change and Maintenance represents a stage where people work to prevent relapse. Finally, termination is a stage where people have no desire to return to their unhealthy behaviours and are sure they will not relapse. This stage is however, rarely reached and people tend to stay in the maintenance stage.
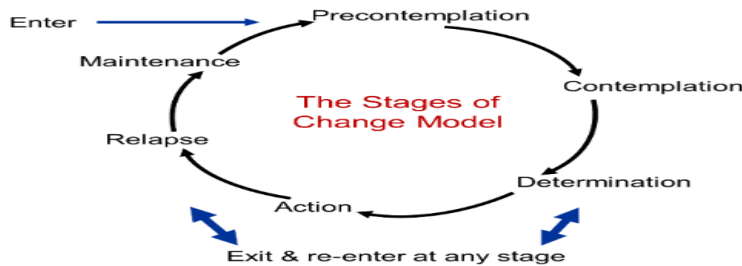
Transtheoretical (Stages of Change) Model

There is substantial evidence that the use of theory in designing and implementing behaviour change interventions improves the effectiveness of interventions (Michie & Johnstan, 2012).

Conclusions and Recommendations

To achieve aims and objectives of SLWM, role of communication is imperative. Media advocacy campaigns and Behaviour Change Communication play a vital role in bringing out desired changes while implementing different components of SLWM related practices. Different communication strategies can be devised to engage rural communities on SLWM related practices through multiple channels of communication. Engaging masses in any policy initiative always helps as it promotes involvement, participation, interaction and dialogue. Public engagement facilitates promotional activities aimed for public good and influences the behaviour change. However, to create and promote effective Behaviour Change Communication messages and to make media advocacy campaign and plans more vibrant and result-oriented, emphasis needs to be laid on certain deliverables such as key messages, broader context, policy framework, communication patterns, policies and strategies.

Relevant, creative and engaging content using different media and communication channels need to be created and disseminated. Key messages need to be developed and to be used in a creative and engaging style, focus needs to be laid on using appropriate language, tone and style in disseminating the related messages; new terms need to be explained, local dialect (wherever necessary) used and a proper context provided. Confusing and complicated processes and terms need to be avoided.

Promotional messages need to be prepared in a creative and engaging manner. Audio, audio-visual, text, pictures, infographics, posters, banners, hoardings, and other visual communication elements to be used to broadcast, telecast or disseminate these messages. It is often said that visuals are powerful than words, so use powerful imagery and videos to convey the message. Also use words carefully and creatively. Say more in less number of words. Make messages audience-specific; use local language to make things easy and comprehensible; use relevant communication strategies to reach out to wider audience. Develop messages that are crisp and easy to remember. Prepare short, catchy and meaningful slogans.

Plans and methods required for bringing in behaviour change need to be planned and discussed. Plans should include details about how and when to reach out to specific audience and the kind of communication plans to be drafted to implement the relevant strategy.

Sensitization programmes need to be organized at community level; trainings in small groups need to be conducted at panchayat level, specialized trainings and workshops to be conducted for local trainers and specialized programmes like 'Train the Trainers' too can be organized for subject experts or resource persons. Local trainers can further train the community leaders. Trainings can be conducted in offline or online mode.

Training modules in different local languages can be prepared and circulated for wider dissemination. Small audio-video capsules related to SLWM theme can be prepared and screened during different programmes, meetings, events and so on. Sponsored programmes can be worked out for different media channels with the purpose to reach out to diverse and heterogeneous audience.

Wall Graffitis can also be used for the purpose. Crisp and specific messages together with artwork can be created. Folk artists and local talent can be used to disseminate specific SLWM related messages.

Content for online consumption can be generated for dissemination on different social media platforms. Content can be prepared in local language using audio only or audio-visual or text only or pictorial or representational form or a combination of all these forms to engage the audience.

Small group meetings or Focus Group Discussions with community leaders, opinion leaders, religious leaders, social activists, panchayat representatives, village elders, youth or civil society members can be arranged in local spaces like panchayat ghars or community facilitation centres with a purpose to involve them in a process to bring about behaviour change.

Thus, to accomplish goals and objectives of SLWM related practices, role of media advocacy campaigns and behaviour change communication is crucial and imperative. Their role in terms of bringing out desired behavioural change is indispensable.

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