



CASE STUDY: INDIA

SULABH INTERNATIONAL: A MOVEMENT TO LIBERATE SCAVENGERS BY IMPLEMENTING A LOW-COST, SAFE SANITATION SYSTEM

Summary

Most toilets built in 20th century India were dry latrines with a water-fed flushing system, due to the expense of pour-flush systems and the scarcity of water. In addition, many did not have formal sanitation. In 2003, the Indian Ministry for Social Justice and Empowerment recorded 676,000 scavengers in the country—people, mainly women, who lift human excreta for a living.

Since 1970, Bindheshwar Pathak's Sulabh International has worked to liberate India's scavengers by employing low-cost, safe sanitation technology. Over the course of three decades Sulabh has built a commercially viable business model—with a significant development impact. Sulabh has developed 26 toilet designs for varying budgets and locations, training 19,000 masons to build low-cost twin-pit toilets using locally available material. It has also installed more than 1.4 million household toilets, and it maintains more than 6,500 public pay-per-use facilities. Its technology has freed 60,000 people from life as a scavenger, offering programmes to reintegrate them into society.



Positive Outcomes for the Poor

- By 2006, Sulabh had liberated about 60,000 scavengers out of the official estimate of 700,000 (or 1.2 million according to unofficial estimates).
- By 2006, Sulabh had installed 1.4 million household toilets and also maintains 6,500 public pay-per-use toilets. An estimated ten million people used its facilities across the country.
- Sulabh also trained 19,000 masons who could build low-cost, twin-pit toilets using locally available materials. Sulabh paid specific attention to women as they trained them in food processing. Sulabh also successfully marketed their products and found buyers that became repeat customers. Of the 11,000 people provided with vocational training, 5,000 were women.
- Sulabh employs over 50,000 associates and presently operates in 26 states.
- Sulabh also offered a plethora of value-added services that ranged from public health advocacy to adult literacy and technology solutions such as fax machines, copiers, telephones, etc. Sulabh used internal and external resources to start a successful English medium school and a variety of training and business incubators targeted at the erstwhile scavengers, and the company also devised programs to get them accepted by the mainstream in a politically sensitive way.



Positive Outcomes for the Business

- The public toilets run by Sulabh break even within eight to nine months.
- Facilities in prominent places were highly profitable.
- In 2005 revenues reached (US\$32 million) with approximately US \$5 million in surplus.

Key Constraints

- *Market information:* Businesses did not know whether poor people would pay to use toilets and related facilities or install toilets.
- *Knowledge and skills:* Lack of widespread knowledge on propagating low-cost hygiene solutions.
- *Access to financial services:* Lack of access to finance by the poor to provide for sanitation.

Key Strategies

- *Adapt products and processes:* Sulabh developed an initial pilot project and demonstrated popularity of pay-per-use toilet facilities in urban Bihar and pioneered low-cost toilet to be installed in poor residential areas.
- *Invest in removing constraints:* Sulabh constructed a museum and planned for a sanitation university.
- *Combine resources and capabilities:* Sulabh took its own designs and trained other NGOs.
- *Engage in policy dialogue with governments:* Sulabh influenced the central government and over 100,000 public toilets will be constructed in addition to local government's provision of toilet-related loans and subsidies.



Strategy Matrix

		Strategies					
		Sulabh	Adapt Products and Processes	Invest in removing market constraints	Leverage the strengths of the poor	Combine resources and capabilities with others	Engage in policy dialogue with government
Constraints	Market information						
	Regulatory environment						
	Physical Infrastructure						
	Knowledge and skills						
	Access to financial services						

Opportunity for Replication and Scaling Up

- State governments that used to invite Sulabh into single-party tenders have now started inviting competitive bids to build and run public toilets.
- Sulabh, in the future, would focus on the “software” associated with public health: sanitation by way of consultancy, education, technology, research and development, training and advocacy. Its objective is to reduce its “hardware” business (i.e. to accept fewer contracts to build and run toilets).
- The creation of a Sulabh Sanitation University will spearhead Sulabh’s future in continuing its basic mission of liberating scavengers and advocating for environmentally sensitive sanitation.