Women’s Leadership in SBM-Gramin
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<tr>
<td>BDO</td>
<td>Block Development Officer</td>
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<td>CDO</td>
<td>Chief Development Officer</td>
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<td>CDPO</td>
<td>Child Development Protection Officer</td>
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<td>CLTS</td>
<td>Community Led Total Sanitation</td>
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<td>CRP</td>
<td>Community Resource Person</td>
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<td>DC</td>
<td>Deputy Commissioner</td>
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<td>DLI</td>
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<td>DM</td>
<td>District Magistrate</td>
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<td>GOI</td>
<td>Government of India</td>
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<td>MDWS</td>
<td>Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation</td>
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<td>OD</td>
<td>Open Defecation</td>
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<td>ODF</td>
<td>Open Defecation Free</td>
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<td>SBM-G</td>
<td>Swachh Bharat Mission – Gramin</td>
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<td>SBMSO</td>
<td>Swachh Bharat Mission Support Operation</td>
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<td>SHG</td>
<td>Self Help Group</td>
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<td>SM</td>
<td>Social Mobilisers</td>
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<td>SBM</td>
<td>Swachh Bharat Mission</td>
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<td>UP</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
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<td>VO</td>
<td>Village Organization</td>
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<td>WSP</td>
<td>Water and Sanitation Program</td>
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<td>WBG</td>
<td>World Bank Group</td>
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1. BACKGROUND

The Government of India’s Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is a journey towards making India Open Defecation Free (ODF). SBM-G (Gramin) is the rural part of the mission. It is implemented by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation. The World Bank Group is providing technical assistance and USD 1.5 billion of support tied to performance indicators including fewer people practicing open defecation, more villages achieving and sustaining ODF status, and more people having access to improved solid and liquid waste management.

In contrast to — and learning lessons from — earlier sanitation programs, SBM-G focuses on achieving collective behavior change, rather than merely encouraging individuals or households to construct toilets. It gives states and districts significant scope to experiment. It takes a participatory approach known as Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), in which people in rural communities are facilitated to make their own assessments and develop their own solutions.

Women are key to the success of this approach. SBM-G provides opportunities for them to take leading roles in their communities. **Women comprise roughly 30-40 percent of the volunteers – Swachhagrahis – who lead the process of ‘triggering’ behavior change at village level.** The process of triggering leads to the emergence of ‘natural leaders’. Women surveillance committees (*Mahila Nigrani Samitis*) work to persuade villagers not to defecate in the open. Women’s self-help groups, *Mahila Samakhya* groups, and others have been drawn into the campaign. Elected women representatives in *Panchayati Raj* Institutions play an active role in many places.

Whenever and wherever women have assumed this leadership role, they have often delivered significant results for their communities and families: sanitation programs are believed to spread more rapidly where women have a greater say.\(^2\) Women’s leadership can catalyze changes in

**TWO TYPES OF LEADERSHIP**

Some leaders are **transactional**: generally located within a structure, such as the bureaucracy, and task-oriented. By contrast, successful women leaders in rural contexts typically display a more transformational style of leadership, often nurtured through informal associations and collectives, and marked by character and confidence rather than knowledge or literacy. Common characteristics of transformational women leaders include the ability to respond positively to hardship, willingness to speak out, honesty, ability to get support from family and spouse, and strong belief in the power of the group.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) For useful discussions on women’s leadership, see for example Barriteau, Violet Eudine, 2003, Constructing A Conceptual Framework For Developing Women’s Transformational Leadership In The Caribbean, Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 52, No. 4, FOCUS ON GENDER II (December 2003), pp. 5-48; and Cheryl de la Rey, 2005, Gender, Women and Leadership, Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity, No. 65, pp. 4-11.

\(^2\) Chambers, Robert, 2009, Going to Scale with Community-Led Total Sanitation: Reflections on Experience, Issues and Ways Forward, IDS PRACTICE PAPER 1
behavior and attitudes at a community level that include more leadership being exercised by other women. With patriarchal traditions tending to restrict women’s actions in public spaces, a woman leader supported by a group of women who also emerge as leaders can become part of a process of sustained change with wider impacts.

This paper outlines the key factors driving, enabling and hampering the emergence of women’s leadership in SBM-G, and identifies emerging recommendations. It is based on detailed interviews with women and other stakeholders across the three States – Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh – of the World Bank’s SBM-G technical assistance program. Through this field research it explores whether women ‘natural leaders’ are seen to have emerged and be prominent in the spread of SBM-G, and if so what are the motivating factors and processes through which leadership emerges and spreads. Although this sounds contradictory, a detailed program design that rests on community initiative can be developed

‘I started with small wards and now have the responsibility to promote SBM-G implementation of whole panchayats’.

– Unknown woman leader, Rohtas District, Bihar.

‘I always maintain that the success and failure of SBM-G is entirely down to the role of women. There were meetings that Jeevika organized in which the women were triggered and once this was accomplished, not a lot of effort needed to be expended on the men. The women would go and insist on toilet construction and stress it enough to make it the first priority for the household. This was a huge push. Then we also triggered the children at school and made them aware of sanitation hygiene – how to wash hands after using the toilet and before consuming food. After this we used them like an army and we would tell them to go home and declare a fast until a toilet is constructed in the house. The young women who go to schools often faced more problems due to absence of toilets and they also played a role in convincing parents to construct toilets.’

– Geeta Devi, Rampur Panchayat, Bihar.

This paper therefore attempts to understand the ways in which women have understood campaign messages and are supporting and leading the process of behavior change in communities.
SBM-G differs in its approach from earlier sanitation programs in several ways. Its focus is on behavior change at a community, not individual or household level; stopping open defecation, rather than building toilets; letting people choose from available alternatives, rather than having a single model of construction; offering incentives for usage, rather than providing subsidies in advance; and encouraging local groups and the local community to lead the process, rather than outsiders. These changes reflect experience with previous programs.

The program reaches out to women in a variety of roles. At the village level, it brings together volunteers – Swachhagrahis – who lead the process of triggering behavior change. Mahila Nigrani Samitis in the villages counsel people to stop open defecation. Women masons are involved in the construction of toilets that are suitable for needs of both women and men. A campaign provides information about menstrual hygiene. Women’s groups – including self-help groups, Mahila Samakhya groups, and others – have been drawn into SBM-G. Elected women representatives of the Panchayati Raj institutions are playing an active role in many places.

The SBM-G is an attempt at CLTS, an approach that has been experimented with in various countries over the last 15-20 years. It facilitates people in rural communities to make their own assessments and develop their own solutions. The process of triggering leads to the emergence of natural leaders, whose actions are a key factor in spreading the mission. They join the Nigrani Samiti (vigilance and follow-up groups) with men, women and children. In some cases, separate committees for women have been formed.

Because of the widely held belief that in situations where women have a greater say, sanitation programs spread more rapidly, special attention is given to women who emerge as leaders within communities. As noted above, they tend to fit the model of “transformational” rather than “transactional” leaders: that is, they emerge often by virtue of their motivation and personal qualities, and not primarily from positions of authority they hold in, for example, Panchayati Raj Institutions—although there would naturally be a high degree of overlap between women who are seen as leaders and those who get elected to such positions.

Effective leadership requires enabling governance structures. The more transparent and accountable these structures are, the greater the respect for people’s right to know and be involved in decisions concerning the community. The third tier of the governance system, the

Figure 1: Nigrani Samiti Members from Rampur Panchayat, Khagariya

Chapter 2: SBM-G and Women’s Participation
Panchayati Raj Institutions, has opened up a space for women as well as men to participate in local decisions. Decision making may be constrained by the structure – for example, if all the resources allocated to a Panchayat are tied up in specified schemes, the role of a leader in influencing allocations is severely curtailed. However, it is an important space with the potential to catalyze transformational leadership.

In relation to SBM-G, the study of ‘natural leadership’ by women in different situations could shift attention towards processes that allow the emergence of such qualities, and the manner in which ‘power’ can be used to strengthen the program. The analysis below is based on the experiences and attitudes of women in villages in this CLTS program who have shown enhanced capacity to understand sanitation issues and engage and motivate other women and people to come together to find solutions.

In talking about leadership, the focus is often on individuals – but the significance of women’s leadership does not lie only in the emergence of champions or role models. Change in behavior and attitudes at community level is more likely when one leader catalyzes leadership among other women, leading to messages being communicated in different ways so that they spread across a large area. Because patriarchal traditions tend to restrict women’s actions in public spaces, a woman leader who is supported by a group of women, and by other women who emerge as leaders, becomes part of a process of sustained change with wider impacts.
The Government of India recognizes that previous flagship sanitation programs have faced many challenges inhibiting effective implementation and sustained momentum. While overall packages included demand-responsive toilet construction, behavior change and sustaining toilet usage, in many districts the focus narrowed to constructing toilets, primarily because this was the main performance metric. Even where achievements were significant in terms of coverage and use, there were no mechanisms to ensure sustained ODF status.

Experiences across different states have suggested the potential role women leaders can play during implementation of SBM at different levels. Water and sanitation concern women closely. Case studies of women leaders who have led the implementation of SBM-G at local level could help in understanding what the enabling factors for such leadership to emerge are. The scope of the study is therefore defined by the following research questions:

- What are the drivers enabling women’s leadership to emerge (enabling environment, physical circumstances, role models, other program campaigns)?
- What factors enable women to play sustained leadership roles in advancing the goals of SBM-G? And what factors hamper their engagement?
- What are the processes through which space for women’s leadership gets expanded and what are the outcomes?
- Are there specific gender-related challenges, such as men and women using the same toilets, for example in relation to norms around menstrual hygiene management?

The study was carried out in Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh as these are the three focus states of the SBM-G technical assistance program being implemented by the World Bank. Case studies were identified in consultation with the World Bank team and Mission Director of each state. Around 450 women were engaged through focus group discussions, of whom around 35 were interviewed in detail about their participation in the program and the leadership roles they took on. Based on these interviews, the case studies discussed below were prepared. Both the group discussions and interviews informed the analysis of the drivers of women’s leadership.

The following criteria were used to identify women leaders:

- The cases should be uncontested and beyond scrutiny, to the extent possible. To fulfil this criterion, the selection was made in consultation with the Mission Director’s office and validated through the field visit.
- The leadership should extend to a reasonable scale, generally at least one Gram Panchayat although examples of significant change on a smaller scale could also be included.
- The leaders should be motivated by considerations beyond improving their own life, or private gain, so excluding women contractors except in unusual cases; in the case of a woman Sarpanch, she should have gone beyond the normal call of duty or identified issues concerning women which were previously not articulated.
- The selection should reflect diversity: an attempt was made to include a woman Sarpanch; women
from different social groups; women with vulnerabilities such as age or disability; and at least one example of group or collective leadership.

The data was collected through a combination of qualitative and participatory data collection tools including:

- Focus group discussions with village women.
- Interviews with selected women leaders.
- Observations to validate information – walking around the village, looking at toilets and water sources.
- Interviews with selected key informants at village, district and state level, to get a rounded picture of opportunities, challenges and the role of leadership in that context.
- Consultation with state-level mission teams on their vision for facilitating women’s leadership within given policy directives.

In consultation with state officials, the districts chosen for study in each state were:

- In Bihar, Rohtash and Khagadia districts. In Khagadia district, focus group discussions were held in Tilauj and Rampur Panchayats with 33 and 42 women respectively. Rampur is highly prone to floods, but is also the first ODF village in Khagadia. Implementation in Khagadia has employed the infrastructure of Jeevika, the Bihar Rural Livelihoods Promotion Society, which is linked to the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM). Its core strategy is to build community institutions of women, primarily self-help groups, which are federated at higher levels. In Rohtas district, where the presence of Jeevika is not as extensive, focus group discussions were organized in the blocks of Sasaram and Samjhaul, which was the first in the district to initiate ODF activities. In all visits, detailed interviews were held with leaders, Panchayat officials, ASHA and anganwadi workers.
- In Uttar Pradesh, Gonda and Varanasi districts. In Gonda district, focus discussions were held in Govindpurva and Majhaura with 28 and 56 women respectively. In Varanasi, the villages of Naipurakala and Dharsauna were visited with focus group discussions of 12 and 36 women. In both districts, some flood-prone parts were inaccessible due to rain. Naipurakala, situated a few kilometers from the periphery of Varanasi, has long since been declared ODF and recognized for its ODF-plus activities. The Pradhan/ Mukhiya, Up-prerak and Secretary were the main initiators and directors of program implementation at the village level so they – along with the ASHAs, anganwadi workers and Nigrani Samiti members – were interviewed.
- In Jharkhand, Simdega and Hazaribagh districts. In Simdega, 70 percent of the population is tribal; in Hazaribagh, the proportion is lower. Basen Gram Panchayat and Purvi Taniser were visited in Simdega, where it is common for women to head the household and we found women trained as masons constructing toilets in the field. Adra village in Katkamdah block and Saraiya village in Padma block were visited in Hazaribagh, where both tribal and non-tribal women leaders were met with. It was found that tribal leaders worked in close association with all members of the community and were able to motivate others, so that leadership was easily diffused through the community. In the case of non-tribal leaders, there was a greater sense of hierarchy between the leaders and their followers.

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4 See at http://brlp.in/
Women’s leadership roles take various forms, depending on local context, personality and capacity to mobilize or belong to a structured group. The research identified six key drivers that, whether in isolation or combination, have led women to emerge as leaders. First, for many women, being active in the campaign has brought social recognition within the village and beyond, often conferring a status they have not experienced before.

The SBM-G campaign creates an environment in which women can claim increased bargaining power within the household. The messages of the campaign resonate with women’s own experiences of being concerned for their privacy and safety when defecating in the open, especially during menstruation and pregnancy: open defecation is unpleasant during monsoons, and there are risks related to insects, snakes, wildlife, and the

Meenu Devi, from Mijhaura, Gonda, comes from the only backward-caste household in her village and is a member of the Nigrani Samiti: “I loved doing it and I was feeling very happy that at least I’m capable of doing something for the village.” She initially felt mocked for doing voluntary work: “The family says that the Nigrani Samiti doesn’t pay and farm work does”, and villagers whom she has asked not to defecate in the open have retorted “are you getting money for doing all this?”. But she says that the backing of the Pradhan and District Magistrate made her feel able to assert herself.

Margaret, Simdega: “I was born in a very poor family. Poverty was such that I did not have clothes to wear. I took my mother’s torn petticoat and stitched skirts for myself... I work in others’ fields to feed my family... When we started this campaign, some of the people, mainly the ones who used to drink, even warned us that they would strip us naked and parade us in the village. But now even they are good to us. Then also the women supported us and we roamed fearlessly in the village.”
possibility of violence. By attaching social status to a household having a toilet, the campaign makes it easier for women to persuade other members of the household to construct a toilet.

Kiran Devi, Khagariya, Bihar, grew up in a home with a toilet, but when she got married she found that open defecation is the norm at her in-laws' house. She found this very difficult: “I was married 13 years ago... It was a massive change in lifestyle. I was not accustomed to open defecation and found it extremely humiliating... My husband was not earning enough for us to be able to save money for the construction and my in-laws were very opposed to the construction given the space and financial constraint.” Following the SBM-G campaign, the in-laws agreed to partition their land to give her and her husband space to construct a toilet, and she borrowed money from her parents to do so.

SBM-G has created an opportunity for entrepreneurship.

Rajmani Dungu, Simdega, Jharkhand: “I came to know about Swachh Bharat Mission through newspapers. I can read a little... [Some other local women and I] saw that there was a lot of work to be done and masons from outside came and earned money here. So we decided that we will also get the training and earn some money in toilet construction... Mason training was both fun and served us well. We worked as masons and earned some money. More than that, we were able to convince people of the benefits to build a toilet and earned respect in the village doing so... Everyone, men, women came to see our work. They also came to see that women are constructing toilets. Earlier they were not confident about our work and used to laugh on us, but we proved to everyone we can do it and do it well!”

Jayshree Sharma, Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, who started a business as a contractor to cover the cost of medical treatment of her sick child: “I asked the Mukhiya to give the order for toilet construction to her Mahila Mandal (Self-Help Group - SHG) to construct the toilets, but he said that the toilets would be constructed by a contractor. I also asked the SHG members to start the work, first in the village and then we would see. But the women were not ready. So when no one agreed, I thought of doing this by myself”. Jayshree arranged money to start up by borrowing from the SHGs in the village and nearby villages. “I got guidance on how to construct this model. I got all the construction material and arranged labour all by myself.”

Women ‘transactional’ leaders, who were already in a position of authority, have expanded their sphere of influence by becoming leaders in the SBM-G campaign.

Anita Singh, Dharsauna, Varanasi, UP. The wife of a lawyer, Anita became the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services – a government early childhood center) supervisor. She went door-to-door to spread awareness on the issue of sanitation, formed a women’s association, and organized a “kishorihatt” (assembly place for girls) to give young women a platform to insist to their brothers that they needed a toilet. She said she was inspired by the former District Magistrate.
For some women, the presence of a collective has sustained their motivation, thus inspiring the community approach to sanitation not just among beneficiaries but the motivators or Swachhagrahis as well.

Indu Devi comes from Ward 12, Tilaunch, Khagariya, Bihar – the first ward to be declared ODF in the Panchayat. She is a member of a Self-Help Group, the Yamuna Jeevika Swayam Sahayata Samuh, Aakash Village Gram Samuh. She accepted the responsibility for making the village ODF. “The first thing I did was to ask my husband to build a toilet. That was because there is no way in which I could have insisted that people build toilets if I myself was defecating in the open... When I set out I was faced with numerous challenges both within and outside the home. People would jeer at me and pass mean comments but I did not lose hope.”

Dorothiya Kerketta, Ex Mukhiya, Basen gram panchayat, Simdega, Jharkand: “I was a teacher in the mission school. I retired from teaching in 2006. I served for 35 years in the school... When I got to know about SBM-G, I was very keen on constructing toilets in every household of my Panchayat as I personally could understand what problems women have to face. Then we went to many meetings and understood how to take up this task.”

Finally, in some cases the motivation has been public spiritedness, combined with a good understanding of the issues. Women who are better educated and had been working in regular jobs such as teaching were already held in some esteem in the village.
5. FACTORS ENABLING AND HAMPERING WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP

The CLTS approach of the SBM-G has contributed to stimulating the emergence of natural leaders in communities, many of whom are women. The research identifies the main factors that have enabled individual women to emerge and grow as leaders, and factors that have hampered them.

ENABLING FACTORS: COMMUNITY BONDING AND SUPPORTIVE ECO-SYSTEM

The research identifies four critical factors for women’s leadership to emerge. First, women who are motivated towards behavior change for ODF villages first need to be able to successfully negotiate within their household: in effect, husbands need to be proud of their wives showing leadership in the community, rather than seeing it as something that undermines their own social standing. Negotiation skills may be innate and can also be learnt. The ability to offer good arguments in support of one’s point of view is needed.

Cross-generational dynamics often help the process, as younger women tend to be readier to actively engage in changing behavior: “The new daughters-in-law who are coming to the village now are completely in favor of having and using a toilet”, said one interviewee.

For women who were not yet playing active roles outside the home, the clarity of the SBM-G messages – with the focus on health – along with the support of the administration and women leaders, provided them with strong arguments they could use in persuading the household towards toilet construction and ending OD. However, the emerging women leaders we found through our research tended already to have transcended the boundary of the home prior to taking on a leadership role.

The presence of opportunities for women to play public roles in a village emerges as a second important enabling factor, as this allows women to develop agency and acquire negotiation skills. Participation in National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (which also gives women some ownership of resources), in Panchayati Raj Institutions, or other kinds of voluntary women’s groups, are all ways in which women can begin to develop agency, paving the way to becoming leaders. This calls for investing in communications to change mentalities among men accordingly.

From school teacher Dorothisya Kerketa in Jharkhand to farm wage worker Tara Devi in Gonda, the women leaders we found did not have to leave the comfort of their homes for the first time to engage in the mission – they were already out in the field, making ends meet and engaging with the daily negotiations of life, often with little or no male ‘support’. The self-reliance that came from their experience of mobility in the public domain made them more easily able to become leaders than women who had not had the opportunity or freedom to be part of activities outside their home, and were mired within familial boundaries.
The third factor identified by the research is that the environment within which women ‘natural leaders’ function needs to be secure and free from violence or criticism. As one woman put it, “People knew that all the women, and office bearers like Mukhiya and Secretary were on our side”. The support by religious leaders likewise is important.

**FACTORS THAT HAMPER WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP**

Women’s leadership is hampered when there is a lack of support from others in the household for women taking on public roles, and when the attitude of the community reinforces this. The role of women as leaders is significantly restricted in the absence of community bonds and existing women’s collectives – which are possible only when the mobility of village women is not unduly restricted.

The impact of women leaders is also found to be much weaker where messaging is mainly targeted to men. It was observed that in some areas, the SBM-G messages focused on health and hygiene. In other areas, the messages tended to focus on the ways in which husbands or brothers could contribute to the honor and well-being of wives and sisters by making sure they had access to toilets. While the latter approach may be

Finally, the impact of women’s leadership is greater in villages where there is a sense of community and togetherness. This makes it easier for women leaders to develop collective strategies, in collaboration with other women, to address local issues and problems in the implementation of the SBM-G: it enables diffusion of ideas and attitudes and the internalization of these ideas by the whole group. Women leaders draw strength from each other, and the ability to work as a team translates into successful outcomes. It is, however, difficult to establish from above a sense of community and togetherness in a village, as it very much depends on personal inclinations.

The government’s role is important in ensuring that the environment is sufficiently secure and free from violence or criticism for women’s leadership to emerge and grow. In communities which have traditionally restricted women’s mobility and public roles, women leaders will emerge only when certain pre-conditions are met, primarily relating to the ability to withstand opposition and indifference. Government policy can create and support safe spaces in which women can play public roles and be seen as ‘legitimate’: the Nigrani Samiti has emerged as such a space within the SBM-G, and more durable spaces include the PRI institutions. The presence in the field of women government officers can be an enormous support to women, stopping men from disrespecting them. Women develop solidarity through being part of groups – an example seen in this study being active and federated self-help groups in some parts of Bihar.

“Even the Imam of the Masjid of the village supported and he would preach that purity is a major ethic of our religion and having a toilet is central to it. About 55% of the population of this village is Muslim and after each Friday prayers there would be a special mention of the Swachhata Abhiyan. He would say how flies are carriers of dirt and filth and they can come and contaminate our environments and even the Masjid at will, therefore the only respite from this menace is to use toilets and stop open defecation.”

*Krishna Yadav, Mukhiya of the Rampur Gram Panchayat, Bihar*
effective in getting compliance to SBM-G goals, it does not encourage women’s active participation as leaders in the campaign.

The discussion in Khagadia, Bihar, for example, made clear that “health” was the central motivating factor for women to insist on the construction of toilets. In other places, “shame” and “fear” were stronger concerns. The Swachhata Abhiyan scheme sought to trigger men into gifting their sisters a toilet instead of jewelry and clothes, but this places the onus of action on men instead of women. One problem with over-emphasizing shame, and fear of women losing their dignity, is that men do not feel that they need to change their own behavior. Where the dominant message is that the need to build the toilet is for public health, it extends to men in an equal measure as to women.

Well-intentioned messaging can backhandedly reinforce patriarchal norms

In some areas, messaging is about women but aimed at men: it addresses men as the ones responsible for taking action, and encourages them to construct a toilet for the welfare and dignity of their wives and sisters. This has the unfortunate effect of bolstering the traditional view of women as needing to be restricted within the home for their safety. Messages that emphasize public health are preferable, as they extend to men and women in equal measure.

Another factor that hampers women’s actions is ideas about pollution and purity that are shared within the community, to which to some extent they too may subscribe. The management of fecal sludge, and the association of caste with manual scavenging, tends to get mixed up in people’s perceptions. The twin pit toilets do not require touching raw or liquid feces as they are matured into manure which when emptied can quite readily be used as compost in agriculture. The single pit latrine is socially difficult to handle and requires specific fecal sludge management practices and dedicated maturing facilities before becoming a product. In order to avoid managing the sludge, women leaders have built pits as deep as 10ft, and 7ft wide, instead of the required 4 feet deep and 3ft wide in the hope that these will not get filled while they are alive. This was the case in a part of UP that has a fairly high water table and if the fecal matter is collecting at such a deep level it runs the risk of contaminating potable water. With the cultural notions of pollution and purity in the backdrop, there is a better acceptance of acids or bleach to re-establish cleanliness. SBM-G recommends cleaning toilets with salt water and brush. The reason behind washing with saltwater has been to prevent organisms that decompose the fecal matter from getting destroyed. The argument is not clearly made that killing the bacteria affecting decomposition will affect the maturation process.
Women taking a leadership role is important not just in the context of SBM-G but also in the context of women’s overall development. Women’s leadership in improving the lives of communities is a source of pride for India. Overall recommendations to strengthen women’s leadership include:

**CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**

**Use government policy to create “safe spaces” for women to exercise agency in governance systems and structures**

Where adequate enabling factors have been present, women’s leadership has expanded within the program. Increased confidence and capacity to voice their views in public was enabled by the creation of “safe spaces” for women to exercise agency in governance systems and structures: for instance, encouraging women’s participation in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and Panchayati Raj Institutions, or other kinds of voluntary women’s groups at village level. The research showed that, when backed by public policy, women’s public participation is seen as more ‘legitimate’. The presence in the field of women government officers can, for example, be an enormous support to women. The Nigrani Samiti has emerged as a safe space within the SBM-G, but needs to be embedded in an eco-system which facilitates women’s collective actions and ensures the safety and security of women in public spaces.

By systematically encouraging women’s leadership, the mission seeks to bring about social change on an enormous scale. Women’s mobility outside the home and active public roles change the traditional perception of their sphere of influence. It has been reported by female Mukhiyas and ‘Utpreaks’ that they were threatened with violence when they resisted open defecation in their village. Poonam, an Utprek in Rohtas, district in Bihar reported that one of the village men openly declared that whoever stopped his wife from defecating in the open, he will beat that person with a rod. Margaret, Mukhiya and Jalsahiya of Simdega district in Jharkhand, was threatened by drunkards that they would parade her naked in the village. Such threatening reactions come in the context of the society not being accustomed to women being agents of change.

Creating an enabling environment requires constant reinforcement of the message that the government fully supports women who are active as Swachhagrahis or Nigrani Samiti members or in other ways, an important aspect of which is safety and security of movement within and across villages.

**SUSTAINING LEADERSHIP**

**Encourage processes through which leadership can be promoted within and across villages. Easy and safe mobility is integral to this**

The leadership of women cannot be sustained in a static social reality: the mission will have to engage with the prevalent view of women’s roles in society. For instance, the exclusive depiction of women in household or caregiving roles would need to be replaced by one that also recognizes the many ways in which women’s labor contributes to economic sustenance of the household. Encouraging portraying both men and women in productive as well as reproductive roles. Such a change in perception would enable men and society in general to accept women leaders such as Jayshree Sharma, who
took up the job of a contractor in Hazaribagh but found it hard to gain popular acceptance because contracting is understood to be a man’s job. It would help women masons trained by Rajmani Dungu in Simdega to transcend the village boundary to construct toilets in nearby villages. The productive potential and mobility of women needs more acceptance in society, and that would be a crucial constraint to overcome in order to sustain leadership.

The emergence of Nigrani Samitis is already a step in this direction, and a strategy could be developed to sustain the public roles of women who have emerged as active members. As the Nigrani Samiti is a collective of voluntary workers, it may be difficult to sustain after an area is declared ODF, but it could be linked to other structures that have a more durable presence – for example, developing monetary or approbatory incentives to engage the leaders emerging from SBM-G in other schemes such as NRLM (National Rural Livelihood Mission), Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) or GPDP (Gram Panchayat Development Plan).

**STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION AND MESSAGING**

**Encourage messaging that focuses on health and sanitation, with less space for messages that emphasize women only in their familial roles**

Different messages have been tried on disparate demographics, depending upon the social context – for instance, emphasizing the honor of women in conservative rural areas. However, while this has given rise to toilets being constructed, it has not always led to men undergoing behavioral change. Therefore, it is recommended that mission activities be centered around health and cleanliness.

Messages that change traditional views of what are appropriate gender and caste roles are a pre-requisite for sustaining and expanding women’s leadership. Traditionally women have been associated with cleaning of the house and lower castes with cleaning of fecal matter – but given that the fecal matter will be within the confines of the house, and manual scavenging has been banned, it is probable that the woman of the house shall be called upon to empty the pits. Messages should emphasize the value of the digested and stabilized manure generated from the pits as a farm resource, to break the stereotypes and encourage the involvement of men in upkeep of the toilet. These should be accompanied by messages that discourage excessively large pits or using excessive water for flushing, and encourage people to clean toilets with warm salt water.

One learning on impactful messaging comes from Jharkhand, where women did sohrai painting on their toilets to accept them as a part of the house. As sohrai paintings are done on house walls as a part of purification rituals, this indicated that toilets are an instrument of keeping ourselves pure and clean. A similar initiative was to plant trees of religious importance in defecation grounds. Such innovative, culturally specific methods of messaging are effective in triggering a lasting wave of change.
CONCLUSION

The personal journey of the women identified for this study demonstrates the positive outcomes women leaders are playing in advancing the goals of SBM-G. The study has suggested that their leadership is motivated by practical needs and by their understanding of the benefits of sanitation for their household and for the community. Stories of women like Indu Devi or Kiran Devi highlight the role women and their groups can play in spreading the benefits of sanitation programs.

Looking ahead, the challenge is to sustain this leadership and promote the emergence of more women leaders in other places. Women’s leadership is not only a matter of individual attributes and personalities; it emerges when the environment is conducive to women taking on new roles beyond their household. Active and continued support from officers and program managers is needed to create a ‘safe space’ for such leadership to develop.

The emergence of women’s leadership is part of a social change process. Significant benefits can materialize when the environment is conducive to such change. The longer-term impacts of women’s leadership in SBM-G will then expand far beyond the immediate efforts to achieve ODF. It will embrace the other SBM-G goals to sustain ODF over time and improve solid and liquid waste management for the well-being of the communities.