

Selection of motivators for Operation Malyuddh Harda and their incentive system – The science and rationale behind

Open defecation is a traditional practice amongst villagers going on unstopped for centuries. Hence to put an end to the habit ingrown since someone's childhood, strong community mobilization is needed at the local level. Sensitizing a community to the ill effects of open defecation and exposing it to the raw truth about oral fecal cycle is an extremely challenging task, given the fact that sanitation, especially open defecation is an avoided discussion topic in rural and urban settings alike. Motivators who could do this on field ought to receive an incentive for this. There were no special funds earmarked for motivators honorarium, hence it was decided to fund them out of the IEC Component of the SBM (R) because motivators are real life, mobile IEC modes more effective than any pamphlet, poster or wall-painting.

Now, neither can ODF be achieved by all communities with the same readiness and ease, nor are there sure-shot mechanisms for ODF attainment by behavioral change, paying the motivators on a regular or monthly basis has a risk of employing them for eternity with funds being wasted without end results. Hence it was decided that the ODF incentive and daily allowance was calculated and payable only after a GP is verified as ODF by the district level team. All travel, logistical, subsistence expenditure has to be borne by the motivators till ODF verification is successful.

Daily allowance was limited to 90 days maximum; it was based on CLTS research finding that 90 days is the optimal duration to follow-up and sustain the momentum created by triggering an open-defecating community. ODF Incentive and daily allowance were calculated based upon the total number of toilets remaining to be constructed in the entire district and the IEC component arising thereof. This result based incentive system, where result is ODF's successful verification, is the specialty of Operation Malyuddh and this gives the government kitty a foolproof shield from wasteful expenses and a mission mode with time-limits. All this risk was clearly agreed by the motivators in a mutual agreement with the District Water and Sanitation Mission. One peculiar condition that was part of agreement was that 5000/- (amount spent on training the motivator) could be recovered from them if they dropped out after registering for training without working for Malyuddh.

Though the result-based incentive system was criticized for being prone to a very high attrition rate as there is no job security or income assurance, it ensured that we depended only upon efficient and enthusiastic motivators for Operation Malyuddh and a war against shit (Mal-yuddh) needed such warriors willing to risk their time and money for a social cause, and not those who want to make this their permanent means of livelihood. The motivators, according to Harda District Water and Sanitation Mission's opinion, needed communication skills enough to convince the toughest arguing open defecator, attitude needed to enlighten the community and the leadership skills enough to streamline the positive energies of an empowered vigilant committee into transforming the open defecating society into an ODF village. The applications were invited for being hired through advertisements in newspapers and flyers.

The large number of candidates applications received put us at a greater responsibility to select only the really talented and dedicated ones and not get misled by the enthusiastic candidates who would accept all our incentive conditions just to be part of government recruitment. Motivators in Harda were selected in a unique three step elimination process, steps being formulated on a scientific basis, after approval from the District Water and Sanitation Mission. Our selection dates clashed with that of the MP-PSC exams and our candidate turn-out percentage was higher. However, our selection process was not lesser in its complexity than the UPSC exam itself.

The tools and techniques of CLTS and triggering were going to be part of their training, hence during selection procedures, only their openness, readiness to ideas, willingness to talk upon the topic, self-confidence, communication skills were assessed. In addition to all the above qualities, a motivator must be available full time and have ample time to spare for the daily follow-ups, so part-timers, NGO associates and students were not preferred as they were engaged elsewhere. No age or educational qualifications were specified as vocal skills were primary to the job at hand.

The first step was a group discussion, wherein the least vocal candidates were eliminated by the panel. The second step was an interview. Here the soft skills of the candidate, willingness to work full-time and consent to our financial risk conditions were assessed. The third and final surprise step was to call the willing candidates for a fitness test at 4.30 am the next day to the local stadium. The last step was to evaluate their punctuality and their general physical fitness. The candidates were given the task to walk a distance of 7 kilometers in 60 minutes. Only completion was counted as sufficient, no advantage was given to those who covered them earlier by jogging or running. After successful 7 km walk, the motivators were handed out the sample agreement which they had to sign for perusal of the terms and conditions and instructed them to come on a specific date for start of work.

Out of total candidates, a little over 50% were filtered out in group discussion and interview. 20% of those selected in interview dropped out by themselves or were late for fitness test and hence not selected. That left us with 140 motivators ready to be trained for Operation Malyuddh. Harda model of recruitment and incentive has already been emulated by many districts till now and adapted according to their own local requirements.

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