



A process of transformation

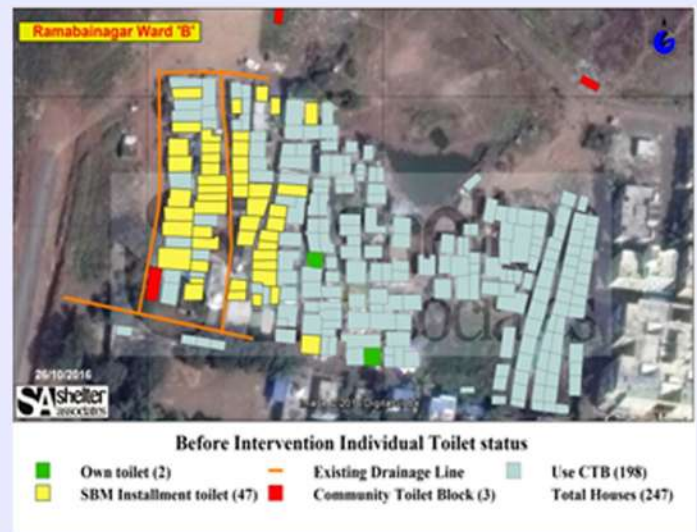
“There have been instances where we have had to run back home because there were men in cars and on bikes who followed us to the Open Defecation spots, parked their cars and glared at us, I did not want my daughters to face the same situation.”

A slum, in a small pocket near Akurdi Railway Station, with a high coverage of 98 percent of its residents engaged in open defecation, Shelter Associates (SA) sought to understand the ground realities and identify the factors that contributed to this as well as assess the city's plans to achieve 100 per cent Open Defecation Free (ODF) status. However established in 2002, covering an area of 7,882 sq. mts, the estimated population of 1,235 dwellers residing in 247 structures of Rama Bai slum, most engaged in open defecation. Overflowing drains, stagnant water, uncollected garbage and widespread open defecation - all these were a common sight.



Condition of Community Toilets in this slum

To counter this problem of Open Defecation community toilets were built. Access to community toilets is an important aspect of safe sanitation especially for urban slum dwellers. It not only restores dignity, privacy, safety and social status for the socio-economically disadvantaged but also has a strong bearing on the aspects of child mortality, maternal health, primary education, gender equity, environmental sustainability, and overall improvement of quality of life. Openly left human waste helps in breeding and transmission of pathogens that increase the incidence of diseases. The problem is especially acute for children, women and adolescent girls. Children, especially under 5 years of age, are most susceptible to diarrhea and can even lose their lives. In case of women, lack of sanitation facilities (with security & safety related concerns) often forces them to restrict themselves from going for defecation, which leads to grave health impacts.



Map of Ramabai slum before SA's intervention

So then could community toilets be the way ahead? Unfortunately even community toilet blocks appear to be failing at ensuring communities adequate amount of privacy, safety and better health. The CTBs here are located far from where people live. Often at night women have to walk down to the CTBs and on the way are either followed or eve teased. Another major concern is the maintenance of these toilets which is neither borne by Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation nor the slum dwellers, making its condition so pathetic that it soon became out of bounds- the intolerable stench, broken doors, non availability of water. Forcing them at the end to engage in open defecation. The residents of Rama Bai had lost HOPE. A hope to preserve their DIGNITY!

Almost 4 years ago, in 2014 the Government introduced the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) with an ambition of achieving an open defecation free status in cities across India by October 2019. It is no secret to anybody that open defecation is a serious stumbling block to the realization of a 'Swachh Bharat' dream. Under the SBM Model, the households are given the option of building the toilet themselves through installments or having it constructed through PCMC commissioned contractor.

With the coming into picture of the Swachh Bharat Mission most dwellers opted for the solution placed in front of them. But it was not too soon when they realized that they were not happy with how the work went about. Most complained about the inefficiency of both the SBM models.

Sakina B. Mehboob Mahindan says, “We were given a check of Rs.8, 000 in the first installment that was around 2 years back and asked to build the entire toilet and only then would we be given the second installment. We kept our end of the deal, completed the construction, spent around Rs 30, 000 and got the second installment just 2 months back. To our dismay we had to spend more than the stipulated amount, not only that we could not even use the toilet until last year as there was no drainage line for the toilet to be connected. It has been just a year that we have started using the toilet.”

Many shared the same plight as Sakina. They desperately needed an alternate solution to their problem. And now with the ‘Nigraani Pathak’- patrolling the areas every morning and evening, engaging in open defecation had become a challenge.



Sakina Mehboob



Ashwini Kamre

While the SBM Model was opted by a few, many more took into consideration the OHOT model by Shelter Associates. Ashwini Kamre, who worked at a nursery before but after a major fall she broke her leg and since then has faced a lot of difficulty in commuting to the OD spot or even to the community toilets which were located far away. Her family was denied the SBM Model as they did not have all the documents that were required. With Shelter Associates stepping into Rama Bai she at once adopted the OHOT model. “Before adopting the OHOT model with that broken leg of mine I used to walk and go towards the OD spot as that was comparatively nearer than CTB. The pain was unbearable. There were instances where I had to use the latrine but I could not get out of bed and walk to the OD spot. It was difficult and we did not have enough money to build a toilet on our own. But Shelter Associates has helped out a lot, from providing quality materials at our doorstep with a reasonable amount of expenditure in the entire process. It has been 2 months since I have been using the toilet in my house and have not faced any problem that I used to before.”

Another resident, Sunil Bhim Rao Chavan, an auto-rickshaw driver by occupation but also a social worker by passion also thanks Shelter Associates for providing him with a solution to save the dignity of his family. Earlier there were no drainage lines near his abode, “due to my busy schedule I could not even approach PCMC for building drainage lines so that we could construct our own toilets at home. Other than that I also had to support a family of 5 with mine and my wife’s earnings, which is not enough.” He built a toilet in his house with Shelter Associate’s assistance. Not only did he build a toilet for himself but also accomplished his dream of renovating the tin house he lived in by taking a loan from the bank which he now slowly pays off.



Sunil Chavan

Sunil lives by a principle “be good, do good.” Starting from adopting a 10 day old girl child left in the back seat of his rickshaw, to helping out a women suffering from TB thrown out of her house by her husband, to even helping other residents of Rama Bai get a loan, he has done it all with little credit taken for his work. “Wo achaa kaam karta hai,” is all that he loves to hear.



Areas where people resorted to open defecation prior to SA’s intervention

“Cleanliness is next to Godliness”, a proverbial adage that traces its inception to ancient Indian times, is the epitome of irony in the current health situation seen in the by lanes of Ramabai. With Shelter Associates taking up the responsibility of transforming Ramabai into a sustainable urban slum, they have, in present times seen a 100% shift, from Ramabai being an open defecation slum to being an open defecation free slum. They have constructed 102 toilets under the scheme of One Home One Toilet which has dropped the percent of people using CTB before the intervention from 80% to 38% post intervention. The story of Ramabai has surely been a huge success as a slum which shows a major transformation, from being a slum with flaws to becoming an ideal slum.



Pre-intervention condition



Post-intervention condition

