

Researchers and practitioners aim at sanitation policy reform

A three-year “Sida Partnership Driven Collaboration research grant” boosts sustainable sanitation research in flooded areas in India

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has granted 3.9 million SEK for a three-year project on sustainable sanitation research, living examples, capacity development, communications and policy work in India.

In collaboration with the WASH Institute in India, the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), Sweden, will now focus on sustainable sanitation solutions in areas experiencing recurrent flooding in the State of Bihar, the most flood-prone Indian State with more than 16% of the total area flood-affected and with more than 22% of India’s flood-affected population. Of vital importance to reduce human vulnerability in Bihar is better sanitation systems, to be accomplished by increasing coverage of improved sanitation to a higher percentage than the current level of 25%, half of that of India as a whole, and through improved functionality of the systems.

More than half of the world’s open defecators are found in India, Bihar topping the list of open defecation. This practice leads to diarrhoea and water-borne diseases, which in turn annually causes the death of 387 000 children under the age of five. Please refer to the recent Water and Sanitation Programme, World Bank report¹, which establishes that **inadequate sanitation costs India the equivalent of 6.4 per cent of GDP**. One of the key efforts by the Indian Government to curb this alarming situation is the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) to ultimately eradicate the practice of open defecation.

Local implementation with global implications

The study area of the research grant will focus on action research by creating living examples of productive sanitation or resource-based sanitation facilities in schools, urban communities and villages. The research will result in enhanced ecological sanitation knowledge and promotion. Even though the research will be focused on the State of Bihar in India, the results will be of global relevance, since there is limited knowledge on how to provide sustainable sanitation services in flooded rural areas and urban slums: “This project will raise awareness to a problem that silently inflicts millions of individuals, be it annually recurring floods or catastrophes that come with unexpected torrential flooding,” says Cecilia Ruben, researcher and project leader at Stockholm Environment Institute.

¹ [Water and Sanitation Programme, World Bank report](#)

Flooding and the sanitation-related problems strongly affect the most vulnerable individuals, including children under five, the disabled, elderly, child-bearing women and the poor through diarrheal diseases. Uncontained faeces contaminate drinking water and food and cause high rates of morbidity and mortality.

Research endeavours matches the national Total Sanitation Campaign

“Improving the sanitation systems in Bihar is of vital importance, if we are to reduce human vulnerability in this annually flooded State,” says Ruben at Stockholm Environment Institute. This can be accomplished by dovetailing the new possibilities offered under the all-India Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) and its recently amended Guidelines with improved knowledge, technologies and capacity development concerning ecological sanitation in flooded areas.

Stockholm Environment Institute, in collaboration with UNICEF-India, facilitated the inclusion of the ecological sanitation component into the Total Sanitation Campaign Guidelines, paving the way for a nationwide implementation of more sustainable sanitation services. Thus, the TSC is one of the key tools for the Government of India to curb the alarming sanitation situation and to ultimately eradicate the practice of open defecation.

SEI and WASH Institute aim for locally suitable solutions for global dissemination

Now, two key institutions, namely SEI and WASH Institute, dedicated to provide practical solutions to a wide range of water, sanitation, hygiene and environmental issues in India and the neighbouring countries, join hands to further consolidate the momentum gained by inclusion of ecological sanitation in the TSC guidelines. The Sida research grant will be utilized for knowledge dissemination of sustainable sanitation for large scale replication and quality action research in the field of value for sanitation with a focus on economics, effectiveness and efficiency.

The lessons learned from this innovative project will be shared at all levels starting from villages, blocks, districts, state and national as well as with a global target audience. The development of sustainable sanitation solutions in collaboration with WASH Institute regarding flooded areas is in fact a way to meet all the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and not just Target 10, because it has strong bearings on child mortality, maternal health, primary education, gender equity, reduction of hunger and food security, environmental sustainability, global partnerships and ultimately poverty alleviation.

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