

letter to editor

Sanitation problem, smart solution: Swachh Bharat Challenge - 2014

Dear Sir,
Sanitation is an investment with high economic returns. Globally, environmental health issues such as poor sanitation are a major social and public health issue resulting in high mortality and morbidity. Poor sanitation in India impacts on many aspects of human welfare such as education, life choices, use of public space, mobility, ultimately, livelihoods, incomes, and general well-being. India's sanitation deficit leads to losses worth roughly 6% of India's gross domestic product (GDP) and an estimated future losses equivalent to 3.4% of 2006 GDP.^[1] Previous research has shown that in low-income countries, investments in sanitation reap a high benefit at least five times greater than the amount invested.^[2,3] The Economics of Sanitation Initiative study estimates that the total annual economic impact of inadequate sanitation in India amounted to a loss of 2.4 trillion INR in 2006 amounting to per capita annual loss of INR 2180.^[1] The previous programs and campaigns toward improved sanitation failed to bring about the change in the attitude and behavior of the people with regards to sanitation.

The recently launched campaign "Swachh Bharat Mission" is India's biggest ever national level cleanliness drive postindependence.^[4] The aim of the campaign is to accomplish the vision of "clean India" by Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birthday on October 2, 2019. It provides a platform that brings together all collective efforts of citizens toward cleanliness. Each individual will devote 100 h/year toward cleanliness of the surrounding which will come to approximately 2 h/week. The campaign urges everyone to take up the Swachh Bharat Challenge and also inspire others to take up the same challenge given by him. It also puts the responsibility on all the citizens to make this nationwide campaign a resounding success by efforts as an individual campaigner, or as an institution or organization. Celebrities and public figures have taken to the Swachh Bharat Challenge in a big way and are making the impact multiply. Each individual has to take a Swachh Bharat Challenge and take up the cleanliness drive. After completion of the challenge, the individual can nominate or invite other nine people to join the mission, who in turn are expected to nominate nine more. This innovative strategy recognizes the importance of changing people's attitudes, mindsets, and behaviors as a central challenge in winning the battle on sanitation by taking up the challenge and completing it successfully. Let us welcome the renewed rhetoric on sanitation and not repeat the same mistakes by making a truly public driven

chain of challenge toward improved sanitation. Not only a strong political will, but also the innovative initiative of participation and social mobilization will add strength to the cleanliness campaign.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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