

Community toilet maintenance



The community toilets at Dhayari

When it comes down to it, maintenance is the crux of the whole project. It's also the key area where Baandhani could see a long-term role for community participation in the current toilet drive. The SA/Baandhani approach is based on the conviction that the only way maintenance can be effective is for the community, the people who use the toilets, to manage it themselves. That way, each community gets together to work out a maintenance system which they feel will work for their settlement. Each community is different, so different maintenance systems are emerging.



A shiny clean toilet stall at Shanti Nagar

Once a system is worked out at a meeting, it's put into practice. But that's not the end of it. The community's in charge, so they keep an eye on things and see how they're working out. If the system isn't working as they'd hoped, there are more discussions, and a new approach is agreed on. Eventually each settlement will have its own fine-tuned maintenance system, worked out through discussion, experience and agreement.



Women at Bharat Nagar discussing their maintenance system

At **Bharat Nagar's** first new toilet block, the community are trying out an unorthodox system. The local boys were keen to take on the maintenance. The women were sceptical. So a trial scheme was worked out: the boys took on the maintenance for a month – and got the use of the caretaker's room as a gym! – so the community could see what they could do. They proved that they could do a good job, to the satisfaction of the rest of their community, and they're continuing.

At **Shanti Nagar**, a local man, Sandeep, has taken on the job of caretaker. He already lives in the settlement and doesn't need the caretaker's room, so this has become a Baandhani office: a community meeting place. Each family contributes Rs. 20 per month for the toilet maintenance, and the women in the Baandhani collective support Sandeep, especially when he has to face defaulters!

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Things have worked out differently at **Jadhav Nagar**. The local women found that there just weren't enough families using the block to generate enough income to pay a caretaker's salary. What's more, they also saw the potential of the caretaker's room as a community asset, as it's a spacious room which can be used as a community office, for events, etc.

So they worked out their own system. The toilets are kept locked, and each stall is shared by seven families who have the key for their one. They employ a sweeper to come twice a week to go over the whole block, but most of the time, these families look after their own toilets. With just a few families using each stall, if someone messes it up, everyone knows who did it.



A cleaning blitz at Dhayari

There's yet another system in place at **Ambedkar Nagar** in **Dhayari**. The Baandhani collective had been campaigning for a toilet here for some time. Right from the start they had agreed that they wanted the caretaker's room for the community. They also decided that they didn't need a full time caretaker, either from their own community or from outside. Instead they have employed a cleaner who comes in once a day, and otherwise they look after the block between them. There's such a sense of ownership of the block, that no-one's likely to mess it up anyway.



The community toilet block at Jadhav Nagar

Different maintenance systems are emerging in different areas according to the needs and decisions of different communities. This shows that communities are not only capable of managing their toilet blocks, but that they are the only ones who are in a position to work out a maintenance system which suits their settlement.

