

Brief description of the proposal

'Swachhta ki Pathshala' is an educational programme that aims to cultivate civic values among the citizens, especially children of the slum areas of Bhopal. The programme enlightens the kids not only about their fundamental rights, but also about their duties which they need to follow in order to become better citizens.

The programme teaches and trains kids of the age group 7 to 17 years about personal hygiene and cleanliness, maintaining cleanliness in the city, taking care and not vandalizing public property, traffic rules and safety. The subjects otherwise canvassed in schools do not seem to have an impact on the hearts and minds of the children as no practical knowledge about the importance of the civic duties is shown to them.

The motto of the programme was to engage kids to teach adults the importance of civic duties in making Bhopal a better city and India a better country. The idea behind engaging kids was to train the younger generation and use them as catalysts of change. It has been seen that though an adult might not follow when some other family member or friend tells them not to litter or spit, and may start arguing, most adults give in to a child's demand.

'Swachhta ki Pathshala' not only teaches the kids but gives them live examples by involving them in certain activities and asking them to react to the situation. For example, kids of the slum areas gather to attend the pathshala but if they come dressed shabbily, without brushing their teeth, combing their hair or taking a bath, they are asked if they would still like their favourite actors or actresses if they appeared on television with lice in their hair, a runny nose and dirt on their faces.

Once the kids realize the importance of personal hygiene and cleanliness, they are then trained to make the 'Swachhta Brigade' and undertake 'Roko-toko' campaign where the children of the slums take the responsibility to intervene if they see anyone littering or spitting on the streets or public places.

The children are trained by the volunteers of the NGO by doing some role-play exercises to break the ice and get them out of their shells. The volunteers play the role of grown-ups who throw papers, wrappers hither tither and/ or spit on the roadside or while driving their bikes. The kids are asked to stop them. This session polishes the kids and removes the fear of approaching strangers from their minds. If the volunteers see the kids not being able to give the counter-argument for a response during the training, they are taught some replies, to arm them for the real challenge.

After training, when the children spot someone throwing garbage on the streets or spitting pan/gutka etc, they march up to them and ask the adults to change their habits to keep the city clean.

Apart from cleanliness, the volunteers and kids also keep doing activities to spread awareness about helmets and plantation drives to preserve the environment.

Context of implementation

'Swachhta ki pathshala' has been implemented in Bhopal with a high success rate. Started after the 'Swachhta Sarvekhan 2017', the pathshala has been able to train a hundreds of kids residing in the slum areas of Bhopal. The programme is aimed at cultivating a love for fundamental duties in kids and to change the attitude of adults with the help of kids. So far around 2000 children living in slum areas have been trained in more than 80 swachhta ki pathshalas.

The initiative received applause and appreciation from Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan who was proud of the kids taking responsibility to educate the adults about civic duties. MP Alok Sanjar and Mayor Alok Sharma have also given examples of the swachhta brigade during many events.

The 'Swachhta ki Pathshala' incorporates two other programmes – 'Swachhta Brigade' and 'Roko toko' where kids are trained to take responsibility to keep the city clean and deter people from littering the streets and spitting at public places.

Volunteers of the NGO keep kids at the apex. Instead of going to them at their free time, the volunteers seek appointment from the children to ensure maximum participation and 100% attention. The idea is simple and can be implemented easily.

The children are first taught the importance of personal hygiene. In the second step they are asked to convey the message to their families and keep their homes clean. Third comes their locality, then the city and finally the country.

Since change begins from oneself, the children are asked to maintain personal hygiene like brushing their teeth in the morning, taking a bath daily, washing their hair twice a week and wearing clean clothes to make a good impression on people.

Once the change sets in, the children are trained to tackle adults who litter the streets. They are given caps and whistles with 'Swachhta Brigade' printed on them to make the children gain confidence. They are then taken to the markets for a demo where volunteers keep a watch as what the children are doing and how the adults are reacting. The vigilant volunteers are present to protect the children in case of an untoward incident or emergency.

Once the children get the taste of 'telling off adults' they become more confident and enjoy doing it. The adults also feel ashamed at being asked by children to keep the city clean. This way the children also get their little 'revenge' and have a good time making the city cleaner with the help of 'Swachhta Brigade'.

Activities like 'Helmet-awareness drives' are also undertaken by the team of 'Swachhta ki pathshala' to make citizens realise the importance of wearing helmets. The drives were done in creative ways like making rider vow to wear helmets as a mother's day gift, sending the message through kids dressed up as Yamraj and Chitagupt.

A 'fool ko phool' drive was also conducted wherein kids gave flowers to the people who littered and spat on the roads making them realise that if they dirtied the place they lived in, they were the biggest fools in the world.

Details of Solutions

'Swachhta Ki Pathshala' has been very successful in instilling a feeling of belongingness towards the city among the people. The success of the plan can be attributed to the efforts of the children, who took their responsibility seriously. Some changes that can be seen in the citizens are-

Behavioural changes- The people who used to think that it was not their responsibility to keep the city clean have started realizing that the government alone cannot bring about change. They have accepted the fact that change begins with oneself and if all the citizens resolve to throw garbage only in dustbins and use spit-boxes to spit out gutka and paan, the city will automatically become hundreds of times cleaner than it is.

Ensuring better future generations- The programme has played a pivotal role in inculcating good habits in the younger generation. The kids are our future and if they adopt habits keeping the city clean, the same will be passed on to the next generation after them. If kids are trained today, the good values will automatically become like reflex actions in them who will then teach the same to their kids in future.

Empowerment of youth as catalysts of change- PM Modi wishes the youth to come forward to bring about change. Swachhta ki pathshala has utilised the same principal and trusted the responsibility of 'Clean Bhopal' on the kids and provided them with the tools to make it come true. When the kids realise that their efforts are bearing results, they will automatically take more serious issues like education and employment among when they grow up into decision making adults.

Scope of implementation

The initiative can be implemented anywhere in the country where NGOs and locals wish to bring about change. The implementation is simple and doable.

Once a survey of slum areas is done, the volunteers can take an appointment from the children and visit them when it is feasible for the kids. This will guarantee good turnout and 100% attention of the children as only those willing to participate will volunteer to come. Most of the time Sanidhya Samiti involves all the kids from a particular slum and tells their parents about the programme too, so that the family members rest assured that their kids are in good hands.

The one-day training session also includes fun activities like puppet shows and magic shows to pique the interest of the children and keep them from getting bored with lectures. The volunteers also do not deliver long droning lectures to the children but keep the session interactive with open ended questions posed to the kids, to get them to speak about the issues on their own.

Besides, when all the children of all families residing in a particular slum are involved in the activity, their families also support each other and do not try to discourage each other's children. Activities

like 'phool for a fool' have made quite an impact on the slum dwellers as well as other citizens as the children of the 'Swachhta brigade' also implement the same policy in their localities.

The practical, doable and enjoyable activities make it interesting for the kids and help them imbibe the messages and execute them in their real lives, not as habits but as reflex actions.