



Project Sammaan
www.projectsammaan.com



Project Sammaan

NEWSLETTER : MAY - JUNE 2014

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Sammaan is an urban sanitation initiative dedicated to redesigning and improving facilities for slum communities across India. The initiative is being piloted in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack with the aim to replicate it in other cities, if successful.

The objective is to rethink the current models of sanitation facilities and design a new programmatic infrastructure and physical structure that instills a sense of dignity while addressing issues affecting sanitation practices in India and encouraging community members to stop defecating in the open.

Over 100 of the re imagined facilities will be built and a dedicated research team will analyze the qualitative and quantitative impact they have on the communities in which they're built. The results of this intensive research will be shared in an open-sourced toolkit that will allow for replication in cities across India and beyond.

Project Sammaan was born out of the research conducted for the Potty Project, an in-depth design research study focused on all aspects of the current sanitation models employed in urban slum communities throughout India.

BLOG HIGHLIGHT:

“LETTERS, MEETINGS, AND PATIENCE” BY KEVIN SHANE



Maintaining a website and a as-real-time-as-possible blog for Project Sammaan has been extremely challenging for several reasons. The most basic challenge is simply getting people from the various organizations working on the project to contribute. This is certainly understandable, to a certain degree, considering that many of these people have no background, or even interest, in writing. The problem inherent in this recalcitrance though is the mandate to capture the Project Sammaan experience for inclusion in the end-deliverable of a toolkit that will help guide the efforts of others interested in replicating the project. After all, only you can share your story; no one else can know or adequately capture what your experience has been like.

This is well and truly an ancillary concern though, and one that we've taken great strides in addressing through various strategies, whether it be creating questionnaires for people to fill out and then work with me to structure the answers into some cogent and coherent narrative or simply me chasing after and threatening people to get them to contribute. The real issue affecting the upkeep of this blog lies in its fundamental purpose: to share project progress as it happens to act as a repository for learnings that will populate the toolkit. It begs the question, then, as to what should be shared if progress is not being made. As those working on the project, and those regularly following the blog, can unfortunately all-too-well attest, we've been stuck in a rut for some time now, desperately trying to move beyond the tendering phase and to start building the Sammaan facilities.

This is not to say that we've not made progress on various other fronts, such as finalizing the Sammaan identity or working on the facilities' O&M strategy, but any "wins" are quickly tempered by the glaring fact that after nearly 2.5 years, we still have not starting construction.

Despite all of the planning and strategizing that went into creating the project's timelines and structuring the grant with our funding agency and contracts with our government partners and various other stakeholders, the project is grossly delayed, to the point where its very viability, at least financially, is now in question. Building off the need to share learnings in an effort to help others working in this sector, I felt it important to share, honestly and frankly, some aspects of the Sammaan experience that, had we known about at the onset, would have significantly altered our approach to the project, especially in regards to timelines.

If I were pressed to give one reason to explain the delays Sammaan has faced, it would be this: the non-government partners are working off of a stringent timeline that our government partners do not feel beholden to. What we are trying to accomplish is fine and all, and our government partners have bought into the benefits of Sammaan, but there is a real disconnect between what is needed to successfully implement this project and how the government approaches their responsibilities within it. The tendering process is a perfect case-in-point example of this.

We began working on Project Sammaan in January 2012. It took pretty much that entire year to engage with the various stakeholders needed to implement the project, finalize agreements with the local government agencies in the pilot cities, and complete the designs for the 100+ facilities. In early 2013, we began the tendering process with the government. To put it as simply as possible, tendering involves getting all of the designs approved and the associated documentation prepared for public dissemination to invite contractors to bid on constructing the facilities. Based on internal conversations with the government partners, we were anticipating this process taking at most a few months. This "fact" was only reinforced by the Times of India article "32 community toilets for Cuttack slums" from February 2013 in which an Executive Engineer from the Cuttack Municipal Corporation was quoted as saying, "We have plans to start construction work of community toilets from the last week of February." Nearly 16 months later and not only has construction not started, we are nowhere nearer to awarding the contracts to builders than we were when this article was published. The same can certainly be said for the facilities in Bhubaneswar as well.

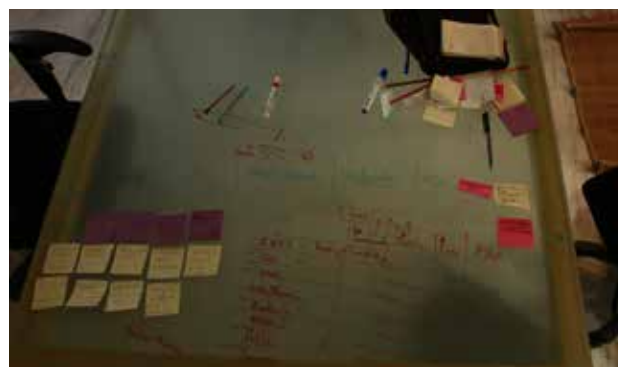
Many of the challenges the project has faced are due to differences in approaches and protocols that I recently wrote about: meetings need to be held in person to discuss the project, rather than simply discussing over email or a phone call, thousands of pages of documents need to be submitted for review, time-consuming to both produce and analyze, and surprisingly easy to lose forcing re-prints of everything; information-sharing tends to be a one-way street with little or no transparency on the internal processes and associated timelines of government activities; meetings are often repeatedly cancelled, and at the last minute, with no regard for the impact doing so has on progress, not to mention morale; and on and on. The basic sentiment one is left feeling is that “what the government says, goes” and there’s no circumventing that. This was probably best encapsulated in a statement by someone who is no longer working on Sammaan when she sincerely asked, “Why don’t we just give all the money to the government and let them work on their own timelines? That’s what they’re going to do anyways”.



Like the individual that shared this statement, many people and organizations have disengaged from Project Sammaan since its inception, whether of their own accord or from being relieved of duty due to lack of progress on their workstream. Fair or not, the project consortium has reacted to the continued delays as any group would be expected to: by brutally evaluating the work of every individual and making the necessary course corrections to ensure any bottlenecks are alleviated and any “dead weight” shed. Despite these extreme, cathartic measures, the project is still limping along.

Now, this may sound unduly critical of the government partners, and readers may find themselves wondering how these individuals may react to such a blatant, hyper-critical assessment of their work, but this is in and of itself remarkable: to a person, every government partner that I’ve spoken to has echoed these same concerns; that the bureaucracy is so inefficient and overwhelming

that everyone knows working with the government is maddening and rapidly devolves into a war of attrition. What’s truly striking is the lack of personal responsibility anyone feels. When speaking about the shortcomings of the government, it’s done in near Jungian terms; there is some external force to blame, a generalized other acting as tormentor that prevents work from being done in a timely, efficient manner. The lack of transparency in bureaucratic processes allows for a seeming lack of any personal responsibility or accountability.



It is a truly helpless and hopeless feeling to work towards something only to have the rules of the game change so drastically and regularly. After 28 months of working on the project, my role has been reduced to a very basic core: to write letters that document every conversation irrespective of how trivial so that it can become part of the project’s official record, to live and work out of the Bhubaneswar office so that someone is at the government’s beck and call whenever a meeting is possible, and to beg, cajole, and even threaten project partners in an effort to keep everyone working with an appropriate sense of urgency.

This experience has been invaluable and, despite the significant challenges faced each day, richly rewarding on a personal and professional level. My one true hope through all of this is that by sharing the challenges and experience of Sammaan will allow others to avoid the same pitfalls, or in the very least to provide a level of understanding that allows for more accurate planning that takes into consideration the considerable investment of time and energy required to execute a project with the government here.

FEATURE: PROGRESS & LOOKING FORWARD

Over the course of the past several weeks, the project management team has launched a bit of a letter-writing campaign to our partners at the municipal corporations, as well as various other senior members of the Odisha state government. The purpose of these formal correspondences is to ensure that the challenges and opinions of the non-government partners working on Project Sammaan are taken into consideration and, more importantly, become part of the permanent record for the initiative.

It can be extremely challenging navigating the bureaucracy of the municipal corporations especially when seeking to ensure that all pertinent information is communicated to all necessary parties in a timely and efficient manner. Emails are ineffective as some of the government partners lack regular access to computers and, further to that point, few have personal email addresses, making it difficult to know if messages sent to generic, catch-all addresses (e.g., the email address for an Executive Engineer at the BMC is 'me1@bmc.go.in') even go through. Meetings are largely impractical as finding a time that works with all parties that would need to attend is nearly impossible. Further to that, meetings that are scheduled are often cancelled at the last minute or rescheduled without any consideration for other people's schedules. Due to these and many more reasons, the simplest solution has been simply to write formal letters and have copies distributed to all parties concerned. This tends to be time-consuming and wasteful in terms of resources, but until a better option is found this will remain a "necessary evil".

The real reason behind this barrage of letters that have descended upon the various government agencies working on Project Sammaan is quite simple: the continued delays in commencing construction is seriously jeopardizing the initiative. This fact had somehow become the 800-pound gorilla in the room that no one wanted to mention, but simply ignoring a problem is surely not going to resolve it. The delays have cost people their jobs, have led to organizations disengaging from the project altogether, have seriously and possibly irrevocably damaged relationships between organizations still working on the project, cost untold financial losses, and, most importantly, left the tens of thousands of residents in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack that will benefit from the project without the sanitation facilities they so desperately need.

The hope is that through openly and honestly sharing the realities impacting Project Sammaan the entire project team will begin to understand and appreciate how their work on an individual level impacts the progress of the

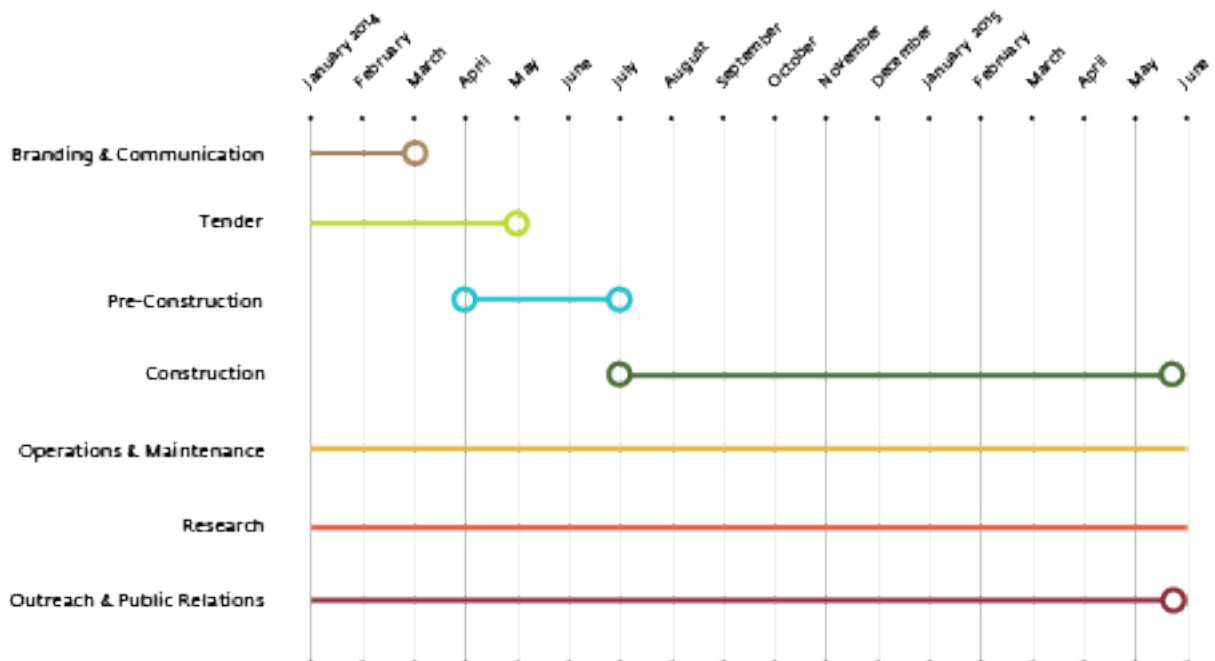
initiative as a whole. It is rather disconcerting to go back through the newsletters and blog posts over the past year to see how desperate the team has been in inculcating a sense of team spirit and to get the project over this heinous tender hump that has stalled the initiative's progress since February 2013.

Several team members have expressed their displeasure with the communication efforts on the project, comparing both the blog and this newsletter to simple public relations fluff and stating that they do not adequately convey "real" information about the project. The letters attempt to cut to the heart of the matter and, going forward, so will the rest of the communication efforts. Again, no one benefits from ignoring a problem. Like cancer, even the smallest issue can grow to be something deadly and the team cannot afford any additional setbacks.

As of the end of May, the construction tendering is still the primary challenge the project faces. There is some hope that the contracts can be awarded in the coming weeks for the Public Toilets in Bhubaneswar, but the Community Toilets in both cities still require some time and a lot of effort. The team is awaiting approval from the H&UD department on splitting the single package of 32 facilities into smaller packages in an effort to entice more bidders, and to lessen the qualification burden imposed on them. The review of documents for the CTs in Bhubaneswar are still underway and no timeframe for completion has been communicated from the government to the rest of the team.

Quite simply put, Project Sammaan will fail and tens of thousands of people in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack will be forced into using unsafe and unsanitary sanitation options, such as open-defecating, if all of those working on the initiative do not approach it as a team. It's no more, nor no less, complicated than that. We need to approach our work not only with an appropriate sense of urgency, but also with the understanding that our individual efforts affect the project as a whole.

TIME LINE



MILESTONE OVERVIEW

To date

- Public Toilet tender release in Bhubaneswar
- Community Toilet tender release in Cuttack

Upcoming

- Tendering of Community Toilets in Bhubaneswar
- Contracts for the Cuttack Community Toilets and Bhubaneswar Public Toilets to be awarded
- Pre-construction dialogues with communities in Cuttack to commence
- Pricing model and O&M framework finalized

June calendar of events

- Presentation of O&M to various government partners
- Sharing the final facility identity and branding with BMC and CMC partners
- Decision to be made on splitting of the CT tender in Cuttack
- Commencement of site clearances in both Bhubaneswar and Cuttack

WORKSTREAMS

A. Liaising & Capacity Building

After a second round of tendering, only one package for Bhubaneswar's Public Toilets had a bidder deemed qualified by the BMC. A decision will be made in June as regarding re-tendering the other packages or moving forward with awarding contracts.

The Engineering team in CMC has sent a proposal for requesting that the CMC CT tenders be split into four small packages, rather than re-tendering the one package, to the H&UD department. If and when this proposal gets administrative approval, the tenders will be re-floated. All the documents, for administrative approval for BMC CT tenders have been submitted, the 180 copies for technical approval, will be submitted in early June. The next 15 days are going to be very crucial, as the stage is set for rebidding of CMC-CT, with individual packages.

Activities in June include:

- Helping to facilitate the floating of tenders for Bhubaneswar's CTs
- Interfacing with the BMC to make a call on awarding of contracts for the PTs

B. Research/Operations & Maintenance

J-PAL has worked on the tendering plan for the operations and maintenance of toilets post-construction. The last few weeks have also been focussed on the preparedness for the baseline survey. J-PAL is in the final stages of digitizing the survey.

Activities in June include:

- Once the construction re-tendering has been successful and the bids received, we will begin baseline data collection activities in Cuttack. This will be carried out in a staggered manner across the sites.

C. Tender & Construction

Delays continue in regards to the tenders as the challenge of finding qualified bidders persists. This topic will be a focal point for a project review meeting to be held with H&UD department Additional Chief Secretary Mr. Srinivas in early June. The team is hopeful that a strategy on how best to move forward with awarding contracts to prospective bidders will be hashed out during this meeting.

The team engaged with a third-party engineer to assist the Architectural team with the review of their drawings and is optimistic that any and all necessary adjustments to these drawings will be made in the coming weeks.

Additionally, negotiations with organizations vying for the PMC contract are well underway and will be completed in the month of June.

Activities in June include:

- Selecting an organization for the PMC contract
- Interfacing regularly with the BMC and CMC partners to facilitate the award of contracts

D. Architecture & Design

All of the drawings for both the Community Toilets and Public Toilets for both cities have been completed. Beginning in May, and likely to continue through the coming months, these drawings are being reviewed by an independent engineer to address any minor changes that need to be made to ensure the facilities are of the highest quality possible.

Activities in June include:

- Review and amend architectural drawings with a third party engineer

E. Outreach & Public Relations

Most of the work on this stream was focused simply on updating the blog and social media channels, as well as in developing and producing the monthly newsletter. Due to the persistent challenge of getting project partners to contribute to communications efforts, this work will now be done solely by the Quicksand team. That said, any contributions from other team members are certainly welcome and appreciated, though solicitations for such will no longer take place.

Activities in June include:

- Updating blog and social media channels
- Work to commence on another Vox Populi documentary film

F. Branding & Communications

The Sammaan facility identity has been finalized and all that remains is completion of the associated signage. One possible direction for the signage was shared with the Quicksand team and feedback will be incorporated into future explorations with the intention of having this work completed by the end of June.

Activities in June include:

- Making necessary adjustments to the facility signage based on direction from the Quicksand team





The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) is a network of 70 affiliated professors around the world who are united by their use of Randomized Evaluations (REs) to answer questions critical to poverty alleviation. J-PAL's mission is to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is based on scientific evidence.

J-PAL is the primary grantee and the project's principal investigators and are designing and conducting the monitoring and evaluation for the facilities:

- » Business model development
- » Operations and Maintenance modelling
- » Project evaluation

A multi-disciplinary innovation consultancy that places user-centered design principles at the core of every innovation effort. The studio has successfully delivered on several new services, products, brands and developmental strategies, creating both measurable social and business impact.

Quicksand is responsible for project management as well as anchoring the hardware design process for the project:

- » User-experience research and corresponding hardware design
- » Design, branding and communication project management
- » Project toolkit and website development



The municipal corporations of the pilot cities Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. These entities are tasked with providing services in sectors such as Health & Sanitation, Slum Development, Urban Planning, and Waste Management to improve the quality of life of their respective citizenries.

The local municipal corporations are key partners in the project and aid in the facilitation of its various components:

- » Provide funding for construction and infrastructure
- » Site selection assistance
- » Identify contractors for construction
- » Ensure regular water, electricity, and sewerage facilities for the toilets
- » Manage sewerage and waste treatment systems
- » Oversee functioning of facilities through a PMO until capacity-building with the BMC is complete
- » Provision of temporary sanitation facilities
- » Ensuring long-term sustainability of the project

The Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR) is an Indian organization committed to working and partnering with marginal communities. It has expertise in conducting research, process documentation, capacity building and strengthening advocacy by leveraging media and networking to shape and impact policy issues related to urban poor.

CFAR is actively involved in facilitating community interactions in the field:

- » Social mapping of each slum
- » Community engagement and dialogue during design and construction phases
- » Facility management training for community members



CTRAN Consulting Manages large, complex development projects, providing the right mix of program management and technical assistance.

They are the one-point contact for interfacing with various government agencies:

- » Establish a Project Management Office within the two municipal corporations to ensure continued, and future, use and grievance redressal of the facilities
- » Facilitate meetings with government representatives
- » Assist in land approval process
- » Set up and operate the help line that ensures proper functioning of the facilities

An award-winning consultancy internationally recognized as amongst the top emerging practices in the world with a commitment towards delivering innovative, context specific designs that encourage sustainable lifestyles. Anagram Architects is a full spectrum spatial design consultancy firm that offers expertise in urbanism, architecture, interior design, and research.

They are leading the architectural design of the 119 facilities:

- » Provide site-specific architectural designs
- » Consult on waste management issues
- » Oversee facility construction

CODESIGN

A brand and communication design studio whose expertise lies in bridging the gap between product and service offerings and what end-users really care about, with communication that is meaningful and relevant.

Codesign is the communication and brand consultant for Project Sammaan.

- » Ensure facility related branding and communication is contextually relevant and encourages behaviour change and adoption
- » Develop the facility identity and corresponding collateral that promotes larger goals of sanitation and health for better life
- » Creating facility signage that is functional and facilitates access and experience

CONCLUSION



Continuing to avoid discussing the fact that Project Sammaan is grossly delayed is in no one's interest. Whether or not this person or that group is to blame is absolutely inconsequential. What will define this project is not whether or not challenges and delays were experienced, but rather in how we faced them. Should we continue along the same lines that have defined the past several months (i.e., without consideration to the ground realities or the interdependencies of workstreams), delays will persist and Project Sammaan will be a failure, plain and simple. Without being overly hyperbolic, the activities of the next few months on an individual and team basis will determine the future of the initiative, for better or worse, and consequently will decide whether or not the tens of thousands of residents unknowingly depending upon us to provide them with improved sanitation will receive the potentially life-changing and life-saving utility they deserve.

