

Beyond political commitment to sanitation: navigating incentives for prioritisation and course correction in India

Case study



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Making sanitation happen: turning 'political will' into action. Policy brief.

Beyond political commitment to sanitation: navigating incentives for prioritisation and course correction in Ethiopia, India and Indonesia. Synthesis report.

Beyond political commitment to sanitation: navigating incentives for prioritisation and course correction in Ethiopia. Case study report.

Beyond political commitment to sanitation: navigating incentives for prioritisation and course correction in Indonesia. Case study report.

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Cover image: Prime Minister Narendra Modi joins a walkathon as part of the launch of a nationwide cleanup campaign in New Delhi, 2 October, 2014. Millions of schoolchildren, officials, and the public joined the campaign to clean parks, public buildings, and streets. Credit: Associate Press.

Executive summary

Historically, rural sanitation programmes in India have been a low priority and failed to achieve expected levels of progress. Over the past few years, however, the importance of sanitation has been rising in India's political agenda, reaching its peak with the launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, making sanitation one of his top priorities. Although it is early days, there are signs that this is revamping the delivery of the sanitation programme and accelerating progress in sanitation coverage.

This study examines how this high-level political commitment is translating into progressive outcomes in the Indian rural sanitation subsector, with a specific focus in Chhattisgarh. Two crucial mediating processes are analysed: prioritisation of sanitation through different layers of government; and course correction to tackle existing and emerging obstacles. The study focuses on the role of incentives in shaping these processes.

Prioritisation is driven by a combination of incentives in Chhattisgarh. The high profile this high-level commitment confers to sanitation offers a route for state officials and politicians to increase their visibility among higher ranking cadres, and therefore their professional opportunities, fostering buy-in. Similarly, performance-based grants are used to incentivise villages to achieve and sustain open defecation free status. A sense of legacy and recognition for efforts and successes that give prestige to sanitation champions also play a role. In addition to the incentives based on personal or professional advantage, others revolve around aligning sanitation with the worldviews of elected leaders, officials and implementers through an appealing narrative. By linking sanitation to cultural heritage and global economic competitiveness, individuals are encouraged to play their part in this cause.

Turning to **course correction**, formal systems for review and verification were reported to be working well in Chhattisgarh, although it was not possible to verify to what extent. Stakeholders reported sharing information and ideas primarily using informal mechanisms such as ad hoc meetings and WhatsApp groups, cutting across rigid hierarchies. Opportunities for lower ranking staff to showcase their achievements and increase their visibility act as key incentives encouraging this flow of information required for course correction.

Incentives for political prioritisation and course correction helped to advance rural sanitation in Chhattisgarh. However, in a context of an intense top-down pressure to deliver in very short time frames, target-driven prioritisation represents a risk both to accurate reporting and local ownership of the programme, as well as constraining the space and time available to find locally appropriate solutions and adapt.

The experience in Chhattisgarh and India offers lessons which might also be relevant for other countries:

- To use both personal or professional incentives addressing the question ‘what’s in it for me?’; and more normative or values-based incentives addressing the question ‘do I believe in this cause?’.
- To create spaces for informal exchange across hierarchies backed by strong signals that supporting sanitation is good for one’s career. Digital technology can facilitate information flow and also offer chances for junior staff to get noticed.
- To develop third party verification mechanisms as well as peer review processes involving administrative staff and community members.
- To give flexibility to sub-national levels to devise their own strategies, taking into account their specificities and contexts.
- To develop mechanisms to identify implementation bottlenecks and learn from local experimentation –what has worked, where, and why– and link those with decision making to review and adapt.
- To resist the temptation to make sanitation a party political issue, while still promoting it as a socially, economically, and therefore politically important issue.

Introduction

This study is part of a wider research project that examines what is needed for high-level political commitment on sanitation to translate into effective action by a government. Given the public health costs and the limited demand that exists without government intervention, those working on sanitation have emphasised the importance of securing political commitment at the highest levels. Less attention has been given to what else might be needed to drive progress on sanitation when that high-level commitment is in place.

We investigate two critical functions that will be needed to turn the spark of high-level political commitment into progress on Sustainable Development Goal Target 6.2, namely 'adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all'. The first is the ability to translate commitment into prioritisation through the machinery of government – the engine driving progress in the sector. The second is the ability to course correct in response to existing and emerging obstacles – the rudder that allows effective steering and adaptation through the complexities of sanitation.

This dual focus – on engine and rudder – builds on WaterAid's previous research on how total sanitation coverage was achieved within a generation in several South East Asian countries such as South Korea and Malaysia.¹

In investigating these functions, we examine the underlying issues of incentives, interest and power that operate at individual and organisational levels. We consider which incentives work for and against effective prioritisation and course correction. We also consider how prioritisation and course correction interrelate.

The India case study concerns rural sanitation, and has a subnational focus on the state of Chhattisgarh. It is part of a global study, which includes case studies in Indonesia (urban sanitation) and Ethiopia (rural sanitation).

The overarching research questions we address are:

1. How do incentives shape the translation of high-level political commitment into prioritisation of sanitation through government machinery?
2. How do incentives enable or hinder course correction to tackle existing and emerging obstacles in the sector?
3. How do prioritisation through government machinery and course correction interrelate?

The research was commissioned by WaterAid and carried out by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Researchers collected primary data through key informant interviews in Delhi and Chhattisgarh in April 2016, interviewing 42 expert stakeholders representing 16 organisations. They gathered secondary information from academic and grey literature before and after primary data collection and sought to validate the emerging findings via a summary provided to a number of interviewees.

The next section introduces the history and context shaping the Indian rural sanitation sector. We then synthesise the findings related to the research questions, before concluding with lessons that could be relevant to other countries.

Context

Over the past few years, the importance of sanitation has been rising in India's political agenda, reaching its peak with the launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, making sanitation one of his top priorities. This high-level political commitment was then mirrored in different states, including Chhattisgarh. Although it is early days, there are signs that this is revamping the delivery of the sanitation programme and accelerating progress in sanitation coverage in the country.

In this section we consider the key elements of the political and governance context that have implications not only for the nature of high-level commitment but also for how sanitation is prioritised through the government machinery, and how processes of course correction and adaptation play out. We then focus on the rural sanitation sector to offer further analysis of the nature of political commitment, and the policies, programmes, past progress, and future ambitions that follow from this.

Political and governance context

Two key political features strongly affect incentive structures at different levels of Government, and therefore the ability of elected and appointed officials to prioritise sanitation and course correct: single party majority; and decentralisation.

In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) commands the first single-party majority government at national level after many decades of multi-party coalitions. The BJP is also the ruling party in Chhattisgarh, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose vision and leadership style drive much of the country's developmental path. He has set a raft of time-bound targets across an apparently broad and inclusive set of socio-economic priorities, which he personally endorses (such as 'Make in India', 'Digital India', 'Skill India', and 'Clean India'). Modi combines his vision with a leadership style comparable with that of a CEO or a taskmaster who sets concrete targets for others to implement,² in an almost autocratic way.³ Furthermore, his governing style promotes popular mobilisation through big rallies and catchy slogans.⁴

Critics allege, however, an increasing tendency towards more divisive populist and religion-based politics. Despite commanding India's first single-party majority government, violence inspired by political rhetoric against Muslim minorities has increased since the BJP reached power,⁵ with Modi's apparent neutrality being questioned.⁶ Despite the highly rigid seniority-based promotion administrative system, patronage at state level remains.⁷ At the same time, in our analysis civil servants did not neglect their public duties, and seemed to be driven by Modi's collective vision of development, at least around sanitation.

India is a federal republic, with explicit demarcation of powers between the central Government, and state governments.⁸ The 73rd constitutional amendment in 1993 transferred power and emphasised accountability in formalising the Panchayati Raj system of village government, arranged at three levels – village (Gram Panchayat), block (Janpad), and district (Zilla) – with elections down to the lowest level, and an administrative wing in each.⁹ Much of the detail for implementation of central Government programmes is nonetheless left to states.¹⁰

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Sanitation is the responsibility of sub-national state governments under the Indian Constitution. National policy-making sits with the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS), but the Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) are in turn responsible for implementation, although arrangements vary across districts. Recent guidelines published in the context of *Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen* (SBM-G)¹¹ define the overarching institutional structure through which SBM-G should be delivered, but devolve to the state enough flexibility to determine its own institutional arrangements. In Chhattisgarh, the state is the facilitator and the Department of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development (PR&RD) is sanitation's institutional home, with a three-tier institutional architecture: a State SBM-G Governing Board, an Apex Committee, and a State SBM-G Directorate.

State-level implementation also relies on volunteers and civil society organisations. Engagement is achieved by channelling efforts through existing citizens' networks (see **Error! Reference source not found.**), and recruiting 'natural leaders' from districts, blocks and villages, with some being labelled as part of the *navratnas* (nine jewels).^{i,12}

Box 1 Community engagement in Chhattisgarh

In Chhattisgarh, the SBM Directorate has engaged with existing CBOs (community-based organisations) and citizens' networks to establish a task force of volunteers involved in sensitising and triggering communities, as well as ensuring they remain in line to become sustainably ODF. For this purpose, the Mission in Chhattisgarh has mobilised women self-help groups, youth groups, part of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) and National Service Scheme (NSS), as well as social caste groups, forestry rights-based groups, and other civil-society actors like religious leaders. This 'brigade' of volunteers is deeply entrenched at grassroots level and takes part in ODF village vigilance committees, for example, or is involved in sensitisation campaigns. They receive CLTS training and support from WaterAid, UNICEF, and local NGOs (for example Samarthan, Lok Shakti, and others). Volunteers receive a task-based incentive for every ten sensitisation sessions delivered, alongside out-of-pocket expenses.

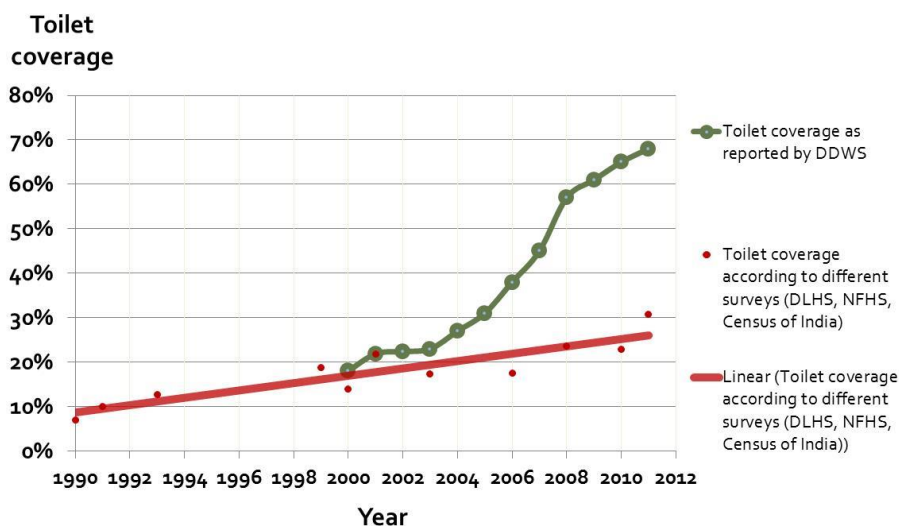
Nature of high-level commitment on rural sanitation

Rural sanitation has been a political concern in India since the 1950s, but progress in was slow because of low political prioritisation and national programmes based on supply-driven approaches. A shift occurred in 1999, with the launch of the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), which introduced a demand-led and community-led approach. Building toilets remained the focus, however, compromising sustainability of outcomes and stalling progress. Figure 1 shows the limited impact that successive national programmes had on increasing coverage rates. It highlights discrepancies

ⁱ Modi introduced the *Navratnas* concept soon after the launch of SBM in a bid to recognise the efforts of ambassadors of sanitation at the village, block, district, and state levels. Chhattisgarh's Chief Minister picked this up in 2014 when he nominated nine eminent personalities from fields of art, culture, social service, and industry as 'nine gems' to ensure their significant contribution to the 'Clean India' campaign in the State.

between results as reported by Government using administrative data on toilets built, and levels of access reported by household surveys.

Figure 1: Growth in access to sanitation in rural India¹³



The 2011 census, in particular, provided an important reality check when it showed 31% of people in rural India had access to toilets, whereas the MDWS had reported coverage to be 68%. Spurred in part by the new data, a greater degree of commitment from senior leadership came with the then MDWS Minister, Jairam Ramesh, who rebranded the TSC 'Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan' (NBA) in 2012. Ramesh was outspoken on sanitation issues and led important initiatives, including a baseline report on sanitation access, shifting attention from ODF status to achievement of 'Nirmal (clean) Status' and recruiting celebrities to publically endorse the programmes.¹⁴ However, back up from such a senior political leader proved insufficient to trigger a major upturn in sanitation progress. This is potentially due to Ramesh's short-term mandate as MDWS Minister and the constrained power of sectoral line ministries.

The most recent milestone in India's sanitation journey is the *Swachh Bharat Mission* (SBM) or 'Clean India Mission'. Launched in 2014 by the newly elected Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, it was designed to accelerate efforts towards achieving 100% access and usage of sanitationⁱⁱ in all India by 2019. As part of this national programme, rural sanitation falls under the *Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen* (SBM-G) and is deployed through community-led and community saturation approachesⁱⁱⁱ focussed on collective behaviour change. Central Government contributes most of the funds (sharing pattern is 60:40 between central and state governments) and

ⁱⁱ In SBM, sanitation is perceived in wider terms, and includes hygiene, solid and liquid waste management, availability of safe and clean drinking water, and clean environment.

ⁱⁱⁱ Saturation approaches refer to accelerating sanitation coverage in such a manner that it comprehensively covers the rural community in a geographic area with Gram panchayats (GP) as the base unit to create more ODF GPs rather than spreading in a large area with increased coverage but no ODF GPs.

since the beginning of the programme the central budget allocation has increased more than threefold, from ₹2,850 crore^{iv} to ₹9,000 crore.¹⁵

At the time of our research, relatively early in the process, stakeholders were characterising SBM as being of a different order from previous sanitation campaigns and programmes. Various reasons can be posited. The first is direct and personal political endorsement from the highest-ranking government official, Modi himself. Although sanitation had been on the radar of previous governments, this is the first time that such a senior political figure has taken sanitation as their ‘pet project’, making it a key feature of their ‘political vision for the nation’,¹⁶ and central to Government priorities.

The second is how those in power gave SBM political and ideological significance. For example, SBM was launched on India’s 68th Independence Day, in 2014, and the vision entails achieving 100% access and use of sanitation in all rural India in time to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, in 2019. SBM borrowed from Gandhi’s rhetoric that sanitation was more important than independence and that cleanliness and was an integral part of living. Modi used this argument in his inaugural speech on SBM, where he described SBM not as his own personal political project, rather that total sanitation for all was already Ghandi’s dream: “India [should] strive to realize *Bapu’s* [father’s] dreams in the right earnest... through collective responsibility”.¹⁷ SBM is also rooted in the belief that this national effort is realistic and achievable, or as Modi puts it: “If Indians can reach Mars, they certainly can clean up the country”.¹⁸ In Chhattisgarh, SBM-G has also co-opted elements of Indian history and mythology, by deploying the concept of Navratnas as a way to recognise specific individuals (‘SBM-G ambassadors’) leading the mission on the ground.

By appropriating messages and symbols linked to India’s key national dates, heroes and cultural traits, Modi seems to be trying to entrench SBM across every level of Indian society. Although values-based messages could be divisive, from our assessment in Chhattisgarh, the appeal towards fulfilling this collective and patriotic mission currently extends across political boundaries, castes, religions and social groups. The sanitation drive also benefits from being sold as part of a wider package – that is, SBM is not just about sanitation or ODF per se, but is part of a broader approach to cleanliness in general. This helped increase people’s understanding of the wider spectrum of positive changes sanitation contributes to in the long term.

The third is that SBM was devised as a ‘Jan andolan’ (a people’s movement),^v which, in the words of one interviewee, helps it to “propagate like wildfire”. This popular momentum was further consolidated by an ongoing advocacy push by the Prime Minister himself (through his speeches and by being the face of the campaign) facilitated by an increased use of information and communications technology. For example, a range of media tools have kept the campaign in people’s minds: advertisements in airports, streets, markets, schools, hospitals; television and radio

^{iv} A crore denotes ten million (10⁷) in the Indian numbering system.

^v According to Modi, people are the real change agents, and therefore for any government’s developmental programme to be successful it has to be cherished by people, and converted into a ‘Jan andolan’ – a people’s movement (c.f. www.narendramodi.in/why-modi-3132).

advertises; and a strong social media campaign and presence in outlets such as Twitter and Facebook.

Last, high-level commitment at national level was also perceived to be expressed, and reinforced across society, with fiscal mechanisms. Interviewees highlighted, for example, how Modi had pushed for the development of funding mechanisms that supplemented SBM's budgetary needs such as the 'Swachh Bharat Kosh' fund which holds funds from corporate social responsibility initiatives; and a 0.5% Swachh Cess^{vi} or sanitation tax on services.

There is some evidence of this high-level commitment in Chhattisgarh too, where budget increases and institutional changes also signal high-level commitment. The state government increased the rural sanitation budget from Rs.345 crore in 2015–16 to Rs.400 crore in the 2016–17 financial year.^{vii} This accounts for 0.93% of the total planned budget for the development programmes in the state, and 2% of the social sector programmes.¹⁹ Furthermore, transfer of sanitation responsibilities from the Public Health and Engineering Department (PHED) towards the Department of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development (PR&RD) was also perceived to signal a major high-level commitment – described as a “game changer” by one interviewee. PR&RD is a key department within Chhattisgarh's institutional configuration, and is substantially better resourced in human and financial capital than is the PHED, which ultimately contributes towards increasing political visibility of this issue.

Translating high-level political commitment into prioritisation through the government machinery

In this section we consider how commitment translates into prioritisation of sanitation through the government machinery – the first of our two key functions, the other being ability to course correct.

We find in Chhattisgarh some evidence of success in cascading prioritisation down through the sector machinery, and consolidating this across political parties and civil society organisations, thanks to a combination of incentives. These include values-based motivations, as well as more instrumental incentives that appeal to people's personal interest, as opposed to their values. The latter include finance, professional and political advancement opportunities, and public recognition.

Values-based incentives: modernity and cultural heritage

A politically charged, values-based message continues to be an overarching guiding incentive. The launch of SBM aligns, in rhetoric, with Modi's vision of a 'New Age India', where economic good governance and development across all spheres of society and sectors are the main propellers towards making the country globally competitive.²⁰ Sanitation ('Clean India') is framed as part of a wider package of

^{vi} This tax affects air travel, communications, eating out and banking, exclusively uses its proceedings for Swachh Bharat initiatives, and was implemented as a step towards ensuring that every citizen is involved in and contributing to Swachh Bharat.

^{vii} Compiled from various SBM-G AIPs, SBM-G Cell, Government of Chhattisgarh available at www.sbm.gov.in/tsc/Report/AnnualActionPlan/RptAIPDownloadFiles.aspx?id=Home

prerequisites necessary to achieve sustainable economic development. Sanitation's importance to the wider goals is characterised in terms of a healthy workforce able to meet global needs and expectations.²¹ This is not to say that the argument is always made, and understood, in terms of technicalities around economic competitiveness. More often it seems to reside in more general expression of national pride and giving greater credibility to efforts to become a global power house – a goal presently undermined by India hosting 60% of all people who defecate in the open.²²

If these examples look towards India's future domestic and international success, there are also many appeals to cultural identity and values. As described, one of the main ways in which SBM is differentiated from previous sanitation campaigns is in the attempts to harness, or appropriate, historical and cultural values. Examples include using Gandhian spectacles as the SBM logo, or the 'nine jewels' as a label for sanitation champions at different levels.

Of course, in a context as complex as India any symbolic references are heavily loaded and may be polarising for some just as they are inclusive for others. The point is not necessarily that these are all-embracing, but that they potentially complement the more personalised and instrumental incentives such as promotion opportunity, financial reward, and public recognition.

Instrumental incentives: financial rewards for collective performance

Financial schemes aim to back values with more instrumental incentives, by providing officials and elected leaders with more resources. Most of these schemes reward collective achievements on sanitation, rather than remunerating specific individuals. They may give officials an opportunity to garner further political or career recognition by providing them with greater funds to spend on sanitation or other priorities. Our interviews and reading highlighted two main financial mechanisms that are emerging to encourage performance in this way.

The first, the Mukhya Mantri Samagra Grameen Vikas Yojana (Chief Minister's Rural Development Scheme) allows blocks and GPs to access financial schemes worth Rs.10 million and Rs.2.5 million, respectively, if they become ODF. By making ODF status a precondition to access this scheme, funding can be used towards other local improvement initiatives such as beautifying village ponds, building roads, or improving water supply. The scheme has the potential to harness local electoral incentives by giving sarpanches (elected village heads) the ability to spend on other things besides sanitation – such as roads and water supply – with potentially greater political salience.

A second scheme, the SBM-G Performance Incentive Grant, is being launched as part of a World Bank loan whereby state performance is assessed across a set of indicators,²³ and rewarded on a per-capita basis, with the value per person increasing as higher levels of performance are reached.^{viii,24} Because of the early

^{viii} For example, for the disbursement-linked indicator on 'Reduction in the prevalence of open defecation', the release of funds to MDWS will be US\$6 per person in a participating state with an annual positive reduction of 0–3%; and/or \$9 per person in a participating state with an annual reduction of more than 3%.

stage of implementation it remains to be seen how well the scheme can prevent syphoning off of funds at different levels, and verify the data that is reported.

It is worth noting that getting financial incentives right in India's rural sanitation sector has been extremely challenging. The major incentive scheme implemented between 2005 and 2008 under the TSC, the Clean Village Award (Nirmal Gram Puraskar) rewarded villages that had achieved full sanitation coverage and were declared ODF. The 2011 census and other specific studies brought results into question and implied significant over-reporting had taken place. The SBM-G guidelines and Performance Incentive Grant place a strong emphasis on verification,²⁵ indicating that this remains a key concern for the SBM-G.

Instrumental incentives: career progression

Personal incentives for administrative officials seem linked to career advancement. In Chhattisgarh, SBM-G is transcending the usual strict rules and offers an opportunity to 'fast track'. Promotion in India's bureaucracy systems occurs through strict tenure-based rules;^{ix,26} however, the state of Chhattisgarh has made achievement towards the mission a key performance indicator for engaged district and block level officials. As such, sanitation offers an opportunity for these officials to increase their visibility with higher ranking state cadres, as well as, potentially, their professional opportunities. Officials were reportedly working for longer hours, going beyond their job description, and pressuring lower ranking staff to deliver. The way in which the programme is overcoming the customary hierarchies in Chhattisgarh is reinforced by staff in higher-ranking positions, such as SBM-G Mission Director and P&RD Minister, reportedly circumventing formal reporting lines when it helped to deliver the mission. As the Minister put it: "I have a direct and open channel of communication with Mission Director through which we discuss daily issues if needed". At the same time, promoting SBM-G also means working with the grain of India's strong bureaucratic hierarchy. District collectors, the lead civil servants in each district, are reportedly seen as key players and are particularly targeted in efforts to cascade the prioritisation effort. Interviewees also highlighted that "if it's seen to be politically expedient, [civil servants] will be more engaged and deliver quicker results".

Instrumental incentives: political advancement

Party politics convey their own set of incentives, somewhat separate from (but overlapping with) the mechanisms operating within the Government bureaucracy. Modi himself has invested considerable political capital in SBM-G. 'Clean India' has been packaged as a wider development initiative that promotes cleanliness in the household and beyond (that is, public spaces, cities and villages). Because of this reach, some interviewees perceived SBM-G to be part of a political tactic whereby

^{ix} As Bertrand et al (2015) explain, in India's administrative service, officers enjoy complete job security, with exit being largely voluntary (and rare in practice). However, promotion occurs by waves every four, nine, 13, 16, 25, and 30 years. Additionally, the more senior one is, the more difficult it becomes to move up the ranks, because senior level jobs depend on vacancies as well as performance (as evaluated by report cards and members of the promotion committee).

Modi's actions are, in the words of one interviewee, visible "across every corner of India".

Party affiliation may matter for how far Modi's political commitment is encouraging more local-level politicians to prioritise SBM-G, at least in Chhattisgarh, where the BJP is also the ruling party within the State Legislative Assembly) State-level BJP politicians see SBM-G as a party priority, against which they need to be seen to prioritise and deliver. For example, in Chhattisgarh the government has set its own target for making the state ODF by December 2018 (nine months before the target Modi set); and state budget allocation to sanitation (urban and rural) has gone up by 360% since 2014.²⁷ Furthermore, political advancement and link to the political elite seemed to be driving performance at district level. This was particularly visible in Rajnandgaon, one of the best-performing districts, the birthplace of Chhattisgarh's Chief Minister and his son (an MP for the district in the lower house of India's parliament).

Nonetheless, although some perceived sanitation to be politically charged, interviews with non-BJP politicians highlighted that, so far, it seems to be transcending party lines. In some instances, they were actively supporting the Mission at district level, suggesting that it is, for now, a cross-party issue. We did not find evidence that BJP's Hindu nationalist hardliners had ideologically appropriated SBM-G, nor were the fundamental tenets of the programme contested by opposition parties. The apparent cross-party support may nonetheless reflect the fact that SBM-G is still in its early stages and non-BJP politicians do not have significant information on performance, with which they could hold the ruling party to account.

One set of incentives seem to run across both elected and appointed officials – obliging them to have toilets themselves. A state policy directive in Chhattisgarh requires having a toilet to file for electoral nomination. Panchayat elected representatives are required to have a toilet at home or construct a toilet within a year of being elected. State civil servants must also have a toilet at home – a possible sign of effort to inculcate a broad acceptance of sanitation among both the political and bureaucratic classes.

Public recognition and praise

Public recognition has driven prioritisation of sanitation across the same levels of government, as well as from higher to lower levels. For example, in 2016 central Government allocated the responsibility for leading promotion of the SBM campaign to all 53 union ministries on a rolling basis. The best ministry and top government officials leading the sanitation drive are to be acknowledged publically.²⁸

Longer-term legacy and fame also seemed to incentivise administrative officials. District and block officials were also using SBM-G as a means by which to develop personal fame and leave a legacy – in the words of one: "by doing something new you will get your fame and promotion". Job remuneration did not seem to play a role at this level, especially because salaries were reportedly low and overtime was not being covered. At more local levels still, the SBM-G 'foot soldiers' receive public recognition during key national moments and days.

Course correction to tackle existing and emerging obstacles

Turning to the second object of our research – the ability to course correct in response to existing and emerging challenges – we make a general distinction between major learning and reform efforts, and more day-to-day adaptation. A key feature of our Chhattisgarh case study is that, despite continued challenges to embed systems for programme-level strategic monitoring and review, stakeholders seem sufficiently incentivised to exchange information and ideas on a more informal basis.

Major learning and reform efforts

Given the recent initiation of SBM, it is important to look further back for examples of key learning and reform, and what shaped these. Evidence-based advocacy has reportedly played an important role in incentivising pre-SBM programmatic changes. Two sets of evidence were identified as critical in setting in motion the TSC's redesign and the launch of NBA. First, the World Bank launched its Flagship Report on the *Economic Impacts of Inadequate Sanitation in India*²⁹ arguing that sector failures cost the country 6.4% of its gross domestic product. Second, the 2011 census revealed that the actual number of toilets on the ground was much lower than the MDWS figures were claiming. Both were picked up by the then MDWS Minister Jairam Ramesh who institutionalised NBA in 2012 and instructed that a baseline report on sanitation access was produced soon after the census, in an attempt to 'reset' the figures. More recently, Modi has arguably made an equivalent move to bring in fresh thinking, commissioning a group of ten state chief ministers (the majority from non-BJP states) to conduct a review on how to achieve SBM with sustainable outcomes.³⁰ The states are reportedly adopting recommendations, including a stronger emphasis on professionalising and funding behaviour change communication and increasing the states' share of SBM funding, although it is too early to tell to what extent.³¹

At the state level, one of the main programmatic changes from NBA to SBM-G in Chhattisgarh was the reassignment of the programme's nodal agency. In the past, rural sanitation programmes were the domain of the PHED. Following the poor results of the 2011 census, major donors like UNICEF advocated for these to be transferred to the Department of PR&RD, on the basis of internal research that had demonstrated that in states where PHED was in charge of implementing sanitation, the programme registered poor levels of accountability and performance. This was picked up by the state chief minister in Chhattisgarh, who, following the launch of SBM-G, triggered the institutional change. In our interviews the change was perceived to be a major political decision and a 'game changer' at state level, because it placed sanitation under one of the most politically salient and wellconnected state ministries.

Current efforts to ensure strategic learning occurs within SBM-G and is based on sound evidence were reportedly proceeding successfully in Chhattisgarh. However, it was not always possible to verify this, and the picture is in any case unlikely to be representative of the situation nationally. SBM-G guidelines frame wider sector learning by providing suggestions for stakeholder engagement and a monitoring framework, while the states decide which to adopt. For example, Rapid Action

Learning Units (RALU) are a key innovation, intended as small, agile teams who can link decision-making with on-the-ground realities. Thus far, however, the only existing RALU is in the state of Andhra Pradesh, and has received significant support from NGOs including WaterAid India.³² There have been discussions about setting up a RALU in Chhattisgarh, but this had not happened at the time of publication.

Mission leaders at state level were reportedly attempting to keep track of implementation progress and steer the direction of SBM-G in Chhattisgarh via many formal meetings. These arrangements require agencies more directly involved in implementing SBM-G (that is, Mission Director and PRIs) to meet more often than those tasked with oversight and guidance (that is, state SBM-G governing body and apex committee). Our interviews nonetheless suggested that ad-hoc communication lines – discussed below – were just as, if not, more, important than the formal processes.

In principle, decision-making around SBM-G is supported by evidence, derived from a multi-tier monitoring and reporting system, which aims to capture information at community level and feed it into a national database. This system has been devised to monitor outcomes (toilet use/ ODF status), outputs (toilet construction), and completion against resource allocation through an online entry system (the SBM-G Management Information System). Data are publicly available via an online portal.^x In Chhattisgarh, in accordance with SBM-G guidelines, information reportedly flows well, from panchayat to block and from block to district through monthly reports. Block and cluster coordinators play a substantial role in physical verification of work by visiting the villages, and are supported by community vigilance committees who monitor village ODF progress on a daily basis. However, it was not possible to independently verify how well this was working in practice. Nationally, verification to ensure data is a sound basis for course correction, as well as performance management and reward, remains a key concern.^{33,34}

Day-to-day adaptation

As implied, what stood out for Chhattisgarh is the more informal and ad-hoc exchanges, sometimes occurring outside official administrative hierarchies. Whereas individuals engaged in major programmatic course correction changes seem to have been motivated to act by advocacy and external pressure, those engaged in SBM-Gs' regular monitoring systems seem to be incentivised by opportunities to increase the visibility of their achievements among peers and superiors, and are aided in this by technology.

In Chhattisgarh numerous such instances of ad-hoc exchange were reported by interviewees: the minister in charge of SBM-G liaising with the mission director almost daily, and especially when new issues arose (although the fact that this often bypassed the apex committee head reportedly gave rise to tensions around respective roles); the mission director reviewing district-level progress on a daily basis by tapping into different WhatsApp groups used by local officials to share progress and seek solutions; reviews with district collectors and CEO-ZPs taking place weekly, through informal and ad-hoc phone conversations and/or visits to

^x Data are available at <http://sbm.gov.in/sbmreport/Home.aspx>

villages; and district collectors and CEO-ZPs deploying staff to produce daily reports and upload them onto designated WhatsApp groups, and conducting weekly visits to villages to check ODF progress.

Given the brief field visits, it was not possible to verify exactly how widespread these practices are, even within Chhattisgarh. However, the reported level of effort, if true, would indicate that stakeholders are fulfilling and may even be going beyond the SBM-G guidelines.^{xi} Given these extra efforts did not receive remuneration, what might be incentivising them? By actively engaging in monitoring and reviewing activities alongside people like the mission director and/or state minister, lower-ranking staff were able to increase their visibility within the higher administrative cadre, while ensuring their achievements were attributed to them. This links back to the motivation discussed above in relation to prioritisation, namely the promotion opportunities associated with SBM.

Insofar as it facilitated exchanges, technology also plays a role in incentivising this level of interaction. Government officials at all levels use WhatsApp as a national cross-learning platform, organising themselves in different groups according to administrative boundaries and using it to share innovative ideas and update on progress. Other mobile apps have helped to track 'live' progress at district and state levels.

Interrelation between prioritisation and course correction

The interplay between political prioritisation through government machinery and course correction seems to have been conducive to advancing the SBM-G agenda in Chhattisgarh. Nonetheless, this virtuous cycle could be brought into question if verification, issues of staff remuneration, and over-reliance on a volunteer workforce are not systematically addressed. We consider the positive story first, before turning to the risks.

Signs of positive interplay between prioritisation and course correction

Perhaps the clearest example of course correction supporting prioritisation in Chhattisgarh is the shift of sanitation to a more politically salient ministry. This reportedly allowed the state government to better drive prioritisation through two key mechanisms. First, placing sanitation programmes under PR&RD capitalised on the existing links the department held across different administration levels (that is, district, bloc, and panchayat) and elected representatives. This enabled the state government to rally and involve key decision-makers. Second, building on PR&RD's cross-sectoral nature, the state government was able to pull together a wide range of

^{xi} The guidelines recommend that, once a village becomes ODF, it declares it to the GP, which verifies its status. If ODF status has been achieved, the GP then refers it to the block, which triggers the inter-GP verification mechanism whereby members of another GP travel to the village that initially declared itself ODF and verify its status. If this inter-verification is successful, the block then forwards the request to the district which triggers an inter-block verification process. If verification proves to be successful, the district then forwards the request to the state, which triggers an inter-district verification mechanism. If it proves to be successful, the village is then finally declared ODF, through a process that can take up to 12 months.

front-line functionaries from different departments engaged in issues like water, nutrition, health, and education, behind the sanitation mission.

In some cases, prioritisation and course correction have been incentivised in similar ways. Most obvious is the way that opportunities for career progression have incentivised officials both to prioritise SBM-G and to participate in learning exchanges with peers and superiors as a basis for more routine course correction. One interviewee characterised this as a defining feature of an Indian political culture in which “nothing happens unless it’s a national priority, and it’s highly attributable”.

More speculatively, these tendencies may lead to a positive feedback, whereby the opportunity for staff to share their views and monitoring data also increases a sense of ownership and willingness to continue to prioritise SBM-G. Equally, by linking monitoring and feedback loops with performance indicators and units for measuring progress, the mechanisms for course correction have begun to reinforce broader momentum around the campaign, ensuring different sections of the elite, bureaucracy and wider society are aware of and personally invested in the mission. Of course, were data to show slow progress or verification to reveal continued over-reporting, it is likely that these feedback loops could have an equally negative effect on prioritisation.

Risks of negative interplay between prioritisation and course correction

This symbiotic interplay is fragile, however. Pressure to deliver is intense, especially in Chhattisgarh with its earlier 2018 target. Top-down, target-driven prioritisation could present a risk both to accurate reporting and continued local level ownership of the programme and ability to find locally appropriate solutions. As currently implemented in Chhattisgarh, SBM-G’s success is based on the continuous deployment of a robust monitoring system and is reliant on a volunteer workforce as well as under-resourced departmental staff, especially at the local level.

On the monitoring side, the challenges of verification have already been mentioned, but two additional issues are worth considering. First, a wider difficulty in getting a generally top-down system, which appears effective at extending access and constructing infrastructure, to shift to focus on behaviour change outcomes that are inevitably harder to monitor (and may therefore be perceived as less visible and attributable). SBM-G was designed on the premise of collective behaviour change; however, recent studies have demonstrated that infrastructure remains the main focus. For example, between April 2015 and February 2016 construction of Individual household latrines accounted for 97% of total expenditure, whereas information, education, and communication expenditure accounted for only 1% of total expenditure (a 3% point drop from financial year 2014–15).³⁵ Second, although ODF verification monitoring is reportedly operationalised in Chhattisgarh, interviewees expressed increasing doubts as to how it could be sustained through a mainly voluntary workforce. Although anecdotal evidence from other states suggests financial incentives exist for those monitoring ODF villages, in Chhattisgarh this was not the case.

Elaborating on these human resourcing challenges, our research suggests that most of the SBM-G staff at district level in Chhattisgarh receive low remuneration compared with other states. Moreover, not every district was found to have enough people supporting implementation – only about a third of districts have a district programme coordinator (DPC), and only 21 of 27 districts have district coordinators.^{xii} Although the voluntary workforce on which SBM-G depends at local level seems to be sufficiently motivated from the locations we visited, dropout and high turnover are inevitably a risk. Staff commitment was reportedly showing signs of strain, as individuals reported feeling overworked and underpaid, especially as they battled with slow acceptance of low-cost technology and geographical inaccessibility of far-flung districts.

Conclusions and lessons

Our review in Chhattisgarh, framed within a wider national context, suggests some impressive progress in prioritising sanitation and building systems for course correction. Challenges inevitably persist: verification of data to ensure it is a sound basis for planning and for financial incentives that reward performance; ensuring top-down pressures to deliver don't result in loss of morale and are matched by sufficient resources and the autonomy to take ownership locally; and making a meaningful transition to prioritise behaviour change over infrastructure.

But highlights also stand out, indicating a shift from previous rural sanitation programmes. The political commitment to sanitation from the highest level – the Prime Minister himself – seems sustained and credible. From what we observed in Chhattisgarh it has translated into political and administrative cadres in the Government coming to see prioritisation of sanitation as being in their personal interest: being seen to do well on SBM-G is a route to promotion within bureaucratic and party political structures. Progress chasing by a few key individuals in the mission structure at state level complements this more bottom-up enthusiasm. At the same time, a less personalised or instrumental set of incentives operates around values and norms. These arguably use national pride to establish a collective commitment – insofar as any cultural symbol in a context as complex as India can be inclusive. These may be forward looking, to India's place among leading modern nations, or retrospective, recalling the words and imagery associated with historical-cultural symbols like Mahatma Gandhi.

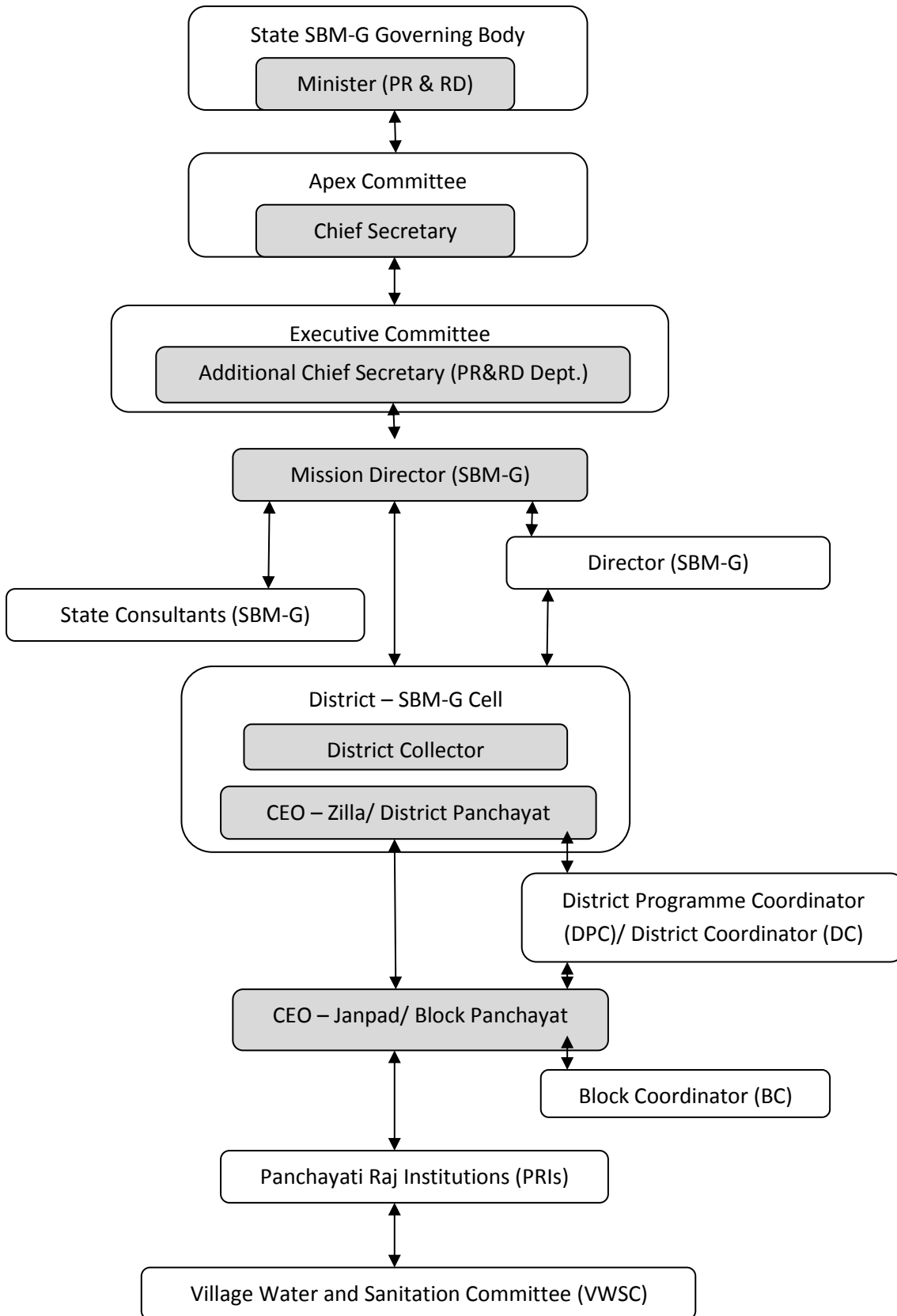
Whether the new emphasis on verified, outcome-level monitoring (both nationally and in Chhattisgarh) can overcome problems of over-reporting in the past, and generate sound data to inform course correction, is yet to be seen. Nonetheless, mechanisms that can support course correction and learning are also emerging at the local level. Aided by technology, these give officials more exposure to their superiors and therefore an active incentive to share information and ideas. More major course correction decisions in the past have been made based on evidence-based advocacy, suggesting a sector that is open to learning and exchange. Some of these, such as the transfer of sanitation to an influential department (PR&RD) with strong links to politicians and local officials across sectors, have been instrumental in facilitating prioritisation through the government machinery.

^{xii} State AIP for SBM-G 2016–17.

Although the outcomes of these shifts and innovations have yet to be tested over time, the experience in Chhattisgarh may hold lessons for governments and their development partners, especially where there is emerging or established political commitment in the first place:

- Complementary use of instrumental, personal incentives, that address the question ‘what’s in it for me?’; and more normative or values-based incentives, that address the question ‘Do I believe in this cause?’ Care needs to be taken with the latter, given the potential for cultural identity to be highly personal and potentially divisive, but both types of incentive can help incentivise action.
- Creating spaces for informal exchange across hierarchies, especially where there are strong signals (instrumental incentives) that sanitation is good for one’s career. Interactive technology, for example group messaging systems such as WhatsApp, can facilitate the flow of information but also personal interactions, giving people an incentive to use them.
- Developing peer review and verification processes involving administrative staff and community members. Although this remains a work in progress in Chhattisgarh and especially in India more widely, it is relevant in most locations – their key challenge is to balance scrutiny with the transaction costs and potential restrictiveness that heavy-handed verification implies.
- Giving flexibility to sub-national levels to devise their own strategies, taking into account their own specificities and contexts. This could include experimenting with key institutional forms – as Chhattisgarh has in shifting the lead department for rural sanitation. Investing in learning from diversity that arises from experimentation – with comparative studies – could be an important complement.
- Resisting temptation to make sanitation a party political issue, while still promoting it as a socially, economically, and therefore politically important issue. This can ensure groups across the political spectrum can get behind a common goal, and reduces likelihood that sanitation will fall in and out of favour with successive electoral cycles.

Annex 1: Chhattisgarh’s SBM-G institutional configuration



Annex 2: Interviewees

Role	Affiliation
Mission director	State SBM-G Cell; Govt. of Chhattisgarh
Consultant	State SBM-G Cell; Govt. of Chhattisgarh
State minister	Govt. of Chhattisgarh, P&RD
District programme coordinator	District SBM Cell, Dhamtari District
Sarpanch, and other members of Panchayat	Doma Gram Panchayat, Dhamtari District
CEO-ZP	Zilla Panchayat, Kanker District
District collector	District Administration, Kanker
NSS coordinator	National Service Scheme Unit, Bastar University, Kanker
State coordinator District coordinator Block coordinators Samarthan (NGO)	Samarthan (local NGO)
CEO-Janpad Panchayat	Block/ Janpad Panchayat, Chamar Block, Kanker district
Sarpanch, other members of Panchayat and community	Shahiwada Panchayat, Chamar block, Kanker district
WASH specialist, UNICEF	UNICEF, Chhattisgarh
Coordinator	Lok Shakti Sangathan (Local NGO)
District programme coordinator	District SBM Cell, Rajnandgaon District
District coordinator	District SBM Cell, Rajnandgaon District
Sub-divisional magistrate	District Administration, Dongargaon sub-division, Rajnandgaon district
CEO-JP	Dongargaon Janpad Panchayat, Rajnandgaon District
CEO-JP	Ambagarh Chowki Janpad Panchayat, Rajnandgaon District
Chairman, Chowki Nagar Panchayat Member, Chowki Nagar Panchayat Member, Chowki Nagar Panchayat Block coordinator, SBM-G Member, Janpad Panchayat NSS coordinator, Chowki	Ambagarh Chowki Janpad Panchayat, Rajnandgaon District
CEO, Zilla Panchayat, Rajnandgaon District	Zilla Panchayat, Rajnandgaon District
State coordinator, Samarthan State coordinator, PRIA State SBM-G RALU member, PRIA Founder, Lok Shakti Sangathan District coordinator, Rajnanadgaon Member, Jan Shakti Sangathan	WaterAid NGO partners in Chhattisgarh
Research coordinator – WASH	WaterAid, India
Programme coordinator, Chhattisgarh	WaterAid, India
Policy manager	WaterAid, India
Chief executive officer	WaterAid, India
Programme director	WASH Institute
WASH specialist	UNICEF, India
Senior water and sanitation specialist	WSP World Bank

www.wateraid.org/fromwilltoaction

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