OneWorld South Asia
Highway to hygiene

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Kumar Alok’s recently released book on rural sanitation addresses the importance of sanitation and hygiene and goes on to analyse the successes and challenges of the expanding sanitation movement in India. It aims to bring about a change in sanitation practices by generating awareness.

Sanitation has always been considered a taboo subject in our society, despite the fact that lack of sanitation and hygiene is responsible for a number of diseases especially among the most vulnerable sections of the society. The subject has been treated with apathy by policy makers across the globe and India has been no exception to this.

Squatting with Dignity/Photo edit: SAGE

Kumar Alok releasing his latest book ‘Squatting with Dignity’ in the national capital said, “The issue of sanitation has been a subject of national shame for India, and the sooner we deal with this agenda, the better it will be for our country.” The book was released by Hon’ble Minister of Rural Development, Dr. C.P. Joshi. UNICEF representative for India, Karin Hulshof, Dr. Savita Singh, Director, Gandhi Smriti, Lizette Burgers, Chief, Child Environment Programme, UNICEF and Rajwant Sandhu, Secretary, DDWS, Government of India.
The release of the book by Dr. C.P. Joshi was followed by an introductory remark by the author, Kumar Alok, which was then followed by an address by each of the panelists.

Kumar, an IAS officer who has worked as Director of Rural Sanitation in the Department of Drinking water Supply, Government of India and also as Water and Environmental Specialist in UNICEF’s New Delhi office, stated that the book will provide knowledge to a large number of sanitation volunteers. “The book offers a detailed account of the evolution of the rural sanitation movement in India, the successes and challenges faced by the policy makers during the process and various communication strategies adopted for wider coverage.”

Using a variety of sources as well as his experience in the ministry, he has made a sincere attempt to document the importance attached to hygiene and sanitation in Vedic India.

Incorporating the philosophies of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda on importance of sanitation, the author traces the policy development and the spread of the sanitation movement in various parts of India, including the debates and shortcomings faced by the decision makers towards implementing the Total Sanitation Campaign. Alok also addresses the various challenges in the sanitation movement regarding infrastructure, technology, communication, implementation and sustainability.

Critically analysing the factors of success and the lessons learned, he guides the way forward by presenting innovative ideas for launching the second generation of sanitation initiatives.

"The Total Sanitation Campaign is the largest and the most recognised sanitation programme in the world"
Speaking at the event, Karin Hulshof underlined the importance of sanitation for the people and stated that the Total Sanitation Campaign is the largest and the most recognised sanitation programme in the world. “Improved sanitation facilities”, said Hulshof, “are significant for most girls and women as it will free them from the prison of daylight and they won’t have to wait for dark to attend to the call of nature.”

Due to the sustained focus of various policy makers and sanitation workers on this subject, the project has grown from a small programme with a meager budget to one of the major programmes with a budget of almost 200- 300 crore.

Since the experiences gained in India are also of great significance to most of the developing countries that face similar type of challenges, Squatting with Dignity is sure to guide practitioners of rural sanitation not only in our own country, but also across the world in meeting the global sanitation challenge.