



SANITATION ISSUES IN RURAL INDIA - GS I AND II MAINS

Q. Improving sanitation coverage has been one of the key public policy miracles in India. Bring out the issues in achieving rural sanitation and enumerate the steps taken by government to achieve the same. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *A critical view of the 'sanitation miracle' in rural India*

What's in the news?

- In the past decade, improving sanitation coverage has been one of the key public policy miracles in India.

Key takeaways:

- Access to water and sanitation is **Goal 6** in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals envisaged by the United Nations.
- Public sanitation programmes have a long history in the country, beginning with the launch of the highly subsidised **Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP)** in 1986.
- The **Total Sanitation Campaign** in 1999 marked a shift from a high subsidy regime to a low subsidy one and a demand-driven approach.
- The public sanitation programme evolved as a mission in 2014 under the **Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G)** to make India Open Defecation Free (ODF) by October 2019.

Present Concern:

- The government needs to identify the shortcomings in the existing programme if it wants to transform India from open defecation free to open defecation free-plus status by 2024-25.

Status of Rural sanitation:

- Access to water and sanitation is Goal 6 in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals envisaged by the United Nations.
- Sanitation coverage in India significantly improved from 39% in 2014 to 100% in 2019, as per the Government of India.
- The Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G), launched in 2014, aimed to make India Open Defecation Free (ODF) by October 2019. The government's current goal is to transition from ODF to ODF Plus by 2024-25, with about 85% of villages already achieving ODF Plus status.
- The National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS) Round-3 (2019-20) reports that 95% of India's rural population had access to toilets. Of these, 79% owned their toilets, 14% shared facilities, and 1% used public toilets.



- Although 96% of these toilets were functional and had water access, only 85% of the rural population used safe and hygienic toilets.
- Toilet access varied by caste, with 97% for upper castes and 95% for Scheduled Castes.
- The upper castes showed a higher percentage of toilet non-use compared to backward castes.
- Between 2014 and 2019, approximately 10 crore toilets were constructed under the SBM-G.

Issues with Sanitation in India:

1. Incomplete Usage Despite Access:

- While sanitation coverage improved to 100% by 2019, only 85% of rural Indians use safe and hygienic toilets, indicating a gap in actual usage.

2. Quality and Infrastructure Issues:

- Problems like malfunctioning facilities, unhygienic conditions, and structural issues like full pits or collapsing superstructures hinder toilet usage.

3. Water Scarcity Impact:

- Lack of water access, especially in rural areas like Gujarat's Dahod district, leads to higher non-use of toilets.

4. Behavioural and Social Norms:

- Cultural norms and behaviours affect toilet usage, with some households using them for purposes other than defecation.

5. Caste-Based Variances:

- Toilet access and usage vary across castes, with upper castes surprisingly showing higher rates of non-use.

6. Challenges in Larger Households:

- Larger households often struggle with toilet usage due to overcrowding and limited facilities.

Initiatives taken by Government:

1. Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP):

- Launched in 1986, it was India's initial step towards improving rural sanitation with substantial subsidies.

2. Total Sanitation Campaign:

- Started in 1999, this marked a shift to a lower subsidy, demand-driven approach.

3. Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G):

- Launched in 2014, this mission aimed to make India Open Defecation Free (ODF) by October 2019.
- The government aims to transform India from ODF to ODF Plus by 2024-25.

4. Phase II of SBM-G:

- Focuses on sustainability, promoting solid and liquid waste management, and covering households left out earlier.

5. National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS):

- Conducted to assess rural sanitation coverage, showing 95% of rural India having toilet access.



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WAY FORWARD:

- Focus on changing cultural and social norms to increase actual toilet usage.
- Ensure toilets are functional and hygienic, addressing issues like collapsing structures and full pits.
- Focus on households that were not covered in the initial phases, particularly in rural areas.
- Tailor strategies to be sensitive to the variations in toilet usage across different social and caste groups.
- Align sanitation initiatives with other related programs like the Jal Jeevan Mission for better outcomes.

