



Gender & Sanitation

This article is based on [“In sanitation, put women in charge”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 06/03/2021. It talks about the role of gender in sanitation and hygiene.

The sustainable development goals (Target 6.2) require India “by 2030, to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

In this context, the government of India has launched the [Swachh Bharat Mission](#) (SBM), which envisages the implementation of the infrastructure of water & sanitation and makes India Open defecation free.

Though the SBM is a people's movement for improving health and hygiene, still there are instances that girls and women face a situation where access to sanitation facilities is not easy and even it is unsafe.

As gender is an important notion in sanitation and hygiene, there is no doubt that women can help to drive change and bring about lasting change as the Jan Andolan of swachhta, health, and sanitation gains momentum.

Challenges Involved in Gender and Sanitation

As per the census 2011, more than fifty percent of India’s population defecated in the open, and recent data showed that about 60% of rural households and 89% of urban households have access to toilets.

- **Marginalized Decision-Making:** In practice, the promoters of swachhta rarely encourage women to participate in water and sanitation committees, which does not guarantee their participation.
 - Further, the age, position in the family, and societal and cultural barriers for females are some of the factors that determine the participation of women in sanitation decision-making.
- **Gender-Based Sanitation Insecurity:** There is a disproportionate burden faced by women especially shortage of or the non-availability of sanitation facilities that can be also called “Gender-based sanitation insecurity.”
 - The desire for privacy during bathing and defecation is different in the case of girls and women than men.
 - Thus, the non-availability of proper sanitation facilities creates a helpless situation for females and leads to the risk of faecal-orally transmitted diseases, urogenital tract infections, urinary incontinence, and chronic constipation.
- **Risks Involved With Open Defecation:** Women face threats to their life and feel unsafe while seeking a toilet facility or while going out for open defecation.
 - This leads to the consumption of less food and water by the women to minimize the need to exit the home to use toilets.
 - The risk involved with feeling unsafe while searching a place to go often to the toilet after dark or early in the morning; and dropping out of school at the onset of menstruation due

to a lack of safe and private disposal facilities.

Way Forward

- **Ensuring Behaviour Change:** Information, education, and communication, which aims at behavior change of the masses, is key to the success of the Swachhta mission 2.0.
 - Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 speaks of sustained behavioral change while embarking on the newer agendas of sustainable solid waste management and safe disposal of wastewater and reuse.
 - A proactive SBM messaging that reflects major transformations, attempting to popularise and portray stories of women groups will create the much-needed social ripple that would inspire women to take complete charge.

Positive Case Studies Bringing Behavioral Change

- There are spirited instances of women leaders in sanitation: Uttara Thakur, a differently-abled panchayat head from Chhattisgarh, was determined to improve sanitation services in her village.
 - She went door-to-door to motivate people to use toilets. Her contagious spirit mobilized the whole village to join hands and become open-defecation free.
- In Jharkhand, trained women masons built over 15 lakh toilets in one year, and helped the state achieve its open defecation free (rural) target.
- Besides the government, the role of non-state actors, including that of institutions like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Unicef, and several NGOs, must be lauded as we pursue sustainable sanitation using a powerful gender lens.
- The government has also very effectively used over 8 lakh swachhagrahis, mainly women, who for small honorariums work to push through behavioral change at the community level.

- **Linking Sanitation & Hygiene With Livelihood:** The India Sanitation Coalition has helped link micro-finance with self-help groups run by women for sanitation needs.
 - Such interventions with these groups should be promoted to drive livelihoods and produce income and well-being impact with the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs.
- **Tracking Gender Outcomes:** A national monitoring and evaluation system to track and measure gender outcomes in SBM is necessary.
 - Several researchers in this space have commented that gender analysis frameworks have a long history in development practice.
 - We can learn from these frameworks to support design, implementation, and measurement that can bridge the gender equality gap in sanitation.
 - There is a need for effective communications and training programs to build the capacity of stakeholders on gender targeting, both on the supply and demand sides of interventions.

Conclusion

There are no quick solutions other than adopting concerted approaches to ensure the survival and protection of the girl child through good health from sanitation and nutrition, and provision of water to liberate women from collecting water and enabling their education.

Drishti Mains Question

As gender is an important notion in sanitation and hygiene, there is no doubt that women can help to drive change in achieving the goals of the Swachh Bharat Mission. Discuss.

This editorial is based on [“Efficacious too: On Covaxin”](#) published in The Hindu on March 05th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.

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