



## Swachh Bharat Mission Reduced Groundwater Contamination: UNICEF

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United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report revealed that groundwater is 12.7 times less likely to be contaminated in Open Defecation Free (ODF) villages than non-ODF villages.

Under the "Environmental impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) on Water, Soil, and Food" by UNICEF, groundwater samples were collected and studied from ODF and non-ODF villages of Odisha, Bihar and West Bengal.

### Findings

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- Soil contamination was found to be 1.13 times more likely in non-ODF villages as compared to ODF villages.
- Non-ODF villages are 1.48 times more likely to have their food contaminated.
- Non-ODF villages are 2.68 times more likely to have household drinking water contaminated compared to ODF villages.
- Study indicated that these substantial reductions can be attributed to the
  - Improvement in sanitation and hygiene practices.
  - Regular monitoring
  - Behaviour change messaging

### Significance of Swachh Bharat Mission

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- As per World Health Organization study on Swachh Bharat Mission in 2018 has found that 3 lakh lives would be annually saved once 100% ODF is achieved.
- According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), open defecation (OD) perpetuates a vicious cycle of disease and poverty, making sanitation and hygiene among the most important drivers of health, social and economic environments.
- People from different sections of the society, from government officials to jawans,

bollywood actors to the sportspersons, industrialists to spiritual leaders, have come forward and joined this mass movement of cleanliness.

- With 38.70% rural sanitation coverage in 2014 before the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) began, India had one of the highest number of people in the world defecating in the open (53 crore).

## Challenge

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- To make ODF sustainable, monitoring ,spot-checking is required for at least one year after ODF status is achieved.
- Motivating volunteers to check the condition of sanitation, and offering them good incentives is necessary.
- For behavioural change of the society, a trained workforce is needed that can trigger communities.
- To address the issue of over or under reporting of government set targets, verification of facts on the ground is extremely important, said Mr Surendra Singh.
- Another problem is the presence of open ponds (water pools) in rural and semi-urban areas along road corridors. The ponds are used by people, livestock for various purposes. The poor quality of water in the ponds gives rise to diseases.
- Despite a ban on manual scavenging, it continues at various places in the country,Unofficial figures reveal presence of 13 lakh manual scavengers; official figures are about two lakh.
- Technology can play a key role in addressing this issue.
- The working conditions of sewer workers are dangerous and hazardous. Every year about 22,000 workers die while cleaning sewers.