

Incidence of open defecation falls sharply

Cleaner India:The lack of sanitation is responsible for the deaths of more than one lakh children a year, says UNICEF.

The number of people defecating in the open in rural India had reduced to less than half of what it was in 2014, according to the Economic Survey, claiming success in rural sanitation due to Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), the flagship scheme of the Centre.

“As per baseline survey conducted by Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the number of persons defecating in open in rural areas, which was 55-crore in October, 2014, declined to 25-crore in January, 2018, at a much faster pace compared to the trend observed before 2014,” the Survey said. “So far, 296 districts and 3,07,349 villages all over the India have been declared as Open Defecation Free (ODF).

Eight States and two Union Territories, i.e., Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Daman & Diu and Chandigarh have been declared as ODF completely.”

More than 90% of the individuals, who had access to toilets, were using them in 2016 and 2017.

“The surveys conducted by National Sample Survey Office (NSSO, 2016) and Quality Council of India (QCI, 2017) on usage of toilets by the individuals who have access to toilets reported more than 90% of individuals using toilets in 2016 and 2017,” the Survey said.

Underlining that the quality of sanitation and hygiene positively impacts health outcomes, the Survey says, “According to UNICEF, the lack of sanitation is responsible for the deaths of over 100,000 children in India annually and for stunting of 48 % children.”

Better health indicators

A pilot study, conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in selected open-defecation free (ODF) and non-ODF districts, showed that households in ODF districts had “significantly better health indicators”.

The Survey also says that there are economic benefits in becoming open-defecation free.

“According to the World Bank estimates, the lack of sanitation facilities costs India over 6-% of GDP. In a report ‘The Financial and Economic Impact of SBM in India (2017)’ UNICEF estimated that a household in an ODF village in rural India saves Rs. 50,000 (\$800) every year,” the Economic Survey states.

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