

SWACHH BHARAT MISSION WELL ON TRACK TO ACHIEVE ODF INDIA

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Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation

Swachh Bharat Mission well on track to achieve ODF India

Government cautions against poor-quality surveys

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Under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), over 5.4 lakh villages and 585 districts have been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF). 27 States and Union Territories have declared themselves ODF so far. Over 9 crore toilets have been built across rural India so far, taking the national rural sanitation coverage up from 39% in 2014 to over 98% today. This progress has been independently verified by a large scale third-party National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey 2017-18 under the World Bank-supported project across 90,000 households in over 6000 villages, which found the rural toilet usage to be 93.4%. Two more independent surveys conducted in the past by the Quality Council of India in 2017, and National Sample Survey Organization in 2016, also found the usage of these toilets to be 91% and 95% respectively. The Mission is on track to achieve an ODF India by October 2019.

In this context, the Ministry has come across media reports quoting certain surveys rife with methodological and technical deficiencies. A recent study, titled "Changes in open defecation in rural North India: 2014-2018", grossly misleads the reader and does not reflect the ground reality. Some of the deficiencies and gaps found in the report are:

Statistically Insignificant and Non-Representative Sample: The report quotes a survey of merely 1558 households in 157 villages against a total of nearly five crore households and 2.3 lakhs villages in the four States surveyed - Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The survey also covers only 2 (out of 33) districts of in Rajasthan, 3 (out of 38) districts in Bihar, 3 (out of 75) districts in UP and 3 (out of 52) districts in Madhya Pradesh, and comes up with extrapolations and exaggerated judgements on sanitation status across these States. Since the SBM is the largest behaviour change program in the world, to pick such a small sample and extrapolate results to an entire State is over simplistic. Such surveys have a huge margin of error.

Lack of clarity on Survey timing: The report also repeatedly mentions that the survey was conducted in “late 2018”, but conspicuously fails to mention the exact dates, which is very misleading as the SBM is an extremely fast moving program, and sanitation status has changed exponentially, on a month to month basis, in the last year. The survey in fact includes a companion study from Udaipur which was even older (April-June 2017).

New Households: The 2018 survey adds 21% new Households as compared to 2014. In such a small survey, an inclusion of overall 21% new Households (as high as 1/3rd in Rajasthan and MP) can substantially alter the outcome and renders the results non-comparable.

Flawed Questionnaire: The key question is on ownership of toilets and not access to a toilet. In reality, some households share toilets, and some use community and public toilets when they may not have a personal household toilet. This is not covered at all through the questionnaire used in the study.

Poor understanding of what constitutes “coercion”: The report also makes attempts to establish that coercion has been used to make people build and use toilets under SBM. The SBM strongly supports positive behaviour change and the Ministry takes note of any coercion in implementation very seriously. Unfortunately, the report fails to distinguish between coercion and affirmative community action, like local Nigrani Samitis, or local GP or community level sanctions on open defecation, which reflects the limited understanding of the community approach to sanitation among the survey conductors and analysts.

Given the glaring gaps in the aforementioned survey, the Ministry would like to highlight that reports based on such erroneous, inconsistent and biased studies serve to mislead readers.

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