NSO Survey on Sanitation - Swachh Bharat Mission Claims

Why in news?

- The latest National Statistical Office (NSO) survey on sanitation has been released recently.
- This has thrown light on the true status of the Swachh Bharat scheme's open defecation-free or ODF India goal.

What are the highlights of the report?

- Only 71% of rural households had access to toilets at a time the Centre was claiming 95%.
- On October 2, 2019, PM Narendra Modi declared that the whole country was ODF with complete access to toilets.
- Some large States were declared ODF i.e. 100% access to toilets and 100% usage, even before the NSO survey began.
- These included Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.
- Others which were declared ODF during the survey period included Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- But, according to the NSO, almost 42% of rural households in Jharkhand had no access to a toilet at that time.
- In Tamil Nadu, the gap was 37%, followed by 34% in Rajasthan.
- In Gujarat, which was one of the earliest States declared ODF, back in October 2017, almost a quarter of all rural households had no toilet access.
- The other major States listed also had significant gaps: Karnataka (30%), MP (29%), Andhra Pradesh (22%) and Maharashtra (22%).
- **Waste disposal** - Only 10% of toilets were built with the twin leach pit system pushed by the Swachh Bharat scheme.
- This safely composts waste on its own without any need for cleaning or disposal.
- More than 50% of rural Indian households with toilets had septic tanks, while another 21% used single pits.
- Both of these needs to be cleaned and faecal sludge produced must be disposed of safely.
- The NSO data thus indicates that the next big challenge may lie in the disposal of waste.

What does the report indicate?

- Though the government claims were invalidated, there is notable progress recorded in toilet access and use in rural areas.
- The 71% access to toilets is a significant improvement over the situation during the last survey period in 2012.
- In 2012, only 40% of rural households had access to toilets.
- The NSO survey had also noted that 95% of people with access to toilets in rural India used them regularly.
- This shows that the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan's efforts to change behaviour have borne fruit.
- This was aided by the fact that water was available around the toilet in more than 95% of cases.

What lies ahead?

- The Centre has disputed the survey results, but it should ideally treat it as a fresh assessment of the ground reality.
- The data could help it review performance in States such as Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan.
- In these states, the lack of toilets is reported to be higher than the national average.
- More fundamentally, the survey provides an opportunity to review other social determinants such as education, housing and water supply.
- These certainly have a strong influence on adoption of sanitation.
- Local bodies who lack the capacity and resources to bring universal sanitation even where political will is present should be equipped.
- Sustained work to eliminate shortfalls in coverage and a massive urban programme are critical to ending open defecation and universalising toilet access.

Source: The Hindu

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