Swachh Bharat Abhiyan – Rajasthan case study

Why in news?

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Implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission in Rajasthan shows that the mission is fraught with its own set of successes and challenges.

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How it has fared so far at the country level?

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- The SBM’s Gramin wing recently declared it has constructed 86.7 million Individual Household Latrines and raised sanitation access to 94% in rural areas.
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- Also, 5,07,369 villages have been made ‘open defecation free’, which is a big outcome from 2014.
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- Swachh Bharat cess played a crucial role here through which Rs.16,400-crore fund was raised for the mission.
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- Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has declared 25 states and union territories free of open defecation(ODF).
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What is the ground reality in Rajasthan?

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- Being declared ODF means that the area's entire population has access to toilets and uses them regularly instead of defecating in the open.
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- But the implementation in Rajasthan shows that the rush to show that deadlines have been met means that some of the most vulnerable households are left out of the scheme's reach.
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- **Inclusion** - The SBM subsidises toilets only for households identified as lacking a toilet in a 2011-12 baseline survey.
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- But these numbers are not reliable as households added to a village after 2012, or those that were excluded from the survey, are left out of government lists.
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- **Self-declaration** – Under pressure from the district administration to declare all villages "ODF", local officials have "self-declared" their ODF status.
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- They even resort to removing the names of those who were unwilling or unable to build latrines to show that targets had been met.
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- **Coercion** - Most of the families that have built latrines don't use them due to the groundwater crisis.
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- Government officials threatened to withhold essential services like water tankers unless the households built latrines.
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- There have also been reported cases of stalling ration grains from the government, if a household do not have a red stamp saying "open-defecation free family" on the ration cards.
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- **Spending** - While 5% of the scheme's budget was to be spent on information and communication campaigns, state government of Rajasthan had used only 0.5% for this purpose.
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- This is second lowest in the country to spend for an ICT campaign for SBM-mission after Uttar Pradesh.
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- **Manual scavenging** - Traditionally oppressed communities continue to manually remove filth from dry latrines used by the upper castes.
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- There are also reports of a similar situation prevailing in some parts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
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What is the issue with surveys?

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- Though the Ministry’s Management Information System only shows whether

latrine construction targets have been met, and not whether they are being used, its surveys claim very high usage of Swachh Bharat latrines.
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- The **National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey**(NARSS) by the ministry and the World Bank said in March 2018 that over 93% people with access to toilets used them.
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- The ministry has also pointed to the findings of a survey by the Quality Council of India, which shows latrine use at 90%.
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- Public health researchers say this contrasts with other evaluations during the same time period.
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- For instance, the **National Family Health Survey-4** found that open defecation at the household level in Ajmer, declared ODF in July 2016, was 39%.
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- The Performance Monitoring and Accountability, a rapid-survey of 4,893 households by Indian Institute of Health Management Research university in Jaipur found that open defecation level in rural households was 49% in October 2017.
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- Six months later, the Rajasthan government declared the state ODF.
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- This raised the concerns on the NARSS survey that it could have been conducted with the goal of showing that targets had been met.
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What lies ahead?

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- The presence of open defecation is getting witnessed even in areas that have been declared as ODF.
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- Hence the government should reach out and assist those who still defecate in the open.
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- The Centre asserts that urban toilet coverage is now 87% of the target, and nearly three-fourths of the wards in the country have door-to-door collection of municipal waste.
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- But the lived experience of the city-dweller shows that waste volumes

continue to grow as economic growth spurs consumption.
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- This creates the need for proper enforcement of the laws on municipal solid waste, protection of water sources and pollution control.
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- SBM must ensure that the manual cleaning of septic tanks is stopped and that funds for rehabilitation reach them.
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- Thus, besides making sanitation a movement through the provision of well-designed toilets and behaviour change in rural India, the SBM should have a broader vision of what constitutes cleanliness.
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- Without full commitment to these aspects of development, there is little chance of meaningfully achieving the Sustainable Development Goals on water and sanitation anytime soon.
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Source: The Hindu, Huffington Post

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