

Swachh Bharat Mission - Progress and Problems

What is SBM?

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- On 2 October 2014, Prime Minister announced the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), which targets eradicating open defecation in India by 2019.

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- SBM is a much-needed endeavour to improve sanitation standards in India.

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- Globally, India had a worse record than even poorer regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Haiti, Ghana, etc. in terms of open defecation.

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What has been the progress?

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- Between October 2014 and February 2016, the share of rural households defecating in the open went down by just over seven percentage points.

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- The figure was still above the halfway mark.

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- Both the extent of open defecation and their progress in eradicating it varies greatly across states.

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What are the problems?

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- **Toilet Coverage** - The states which recorded better toilet coverage also had a lower share of households contributing to open defecation.

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- Sikkim, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, which had higher individual toilet coverage, fared best in terms of rural sanitation.

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- Odisha, Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand and Telangana with less coverage were among the laggards.
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- **Usage** - 6% of households in India reported open defecation despite having toilets.
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- **Access to Water** - It is important in determining toilet use. 63% of the households that defecated in the open reported having toilets without running water.
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- States with poor access to water in toilets have a higher share of households contributing to open defecation. e.g Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Bihar
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- **Budget** - The government set aside Rs 9,000 crore for rural sanitation in the 2016-17 Union budget but this has been accompanied by declining funds for the National Rural Drinking Water Programme.
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- This is unlikely to help eradicate open defecation.
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- **Caste-based discrimination** in the provision of water also seems to be responsible for low toilet usage.
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- Out of the 102 hand-pumps constructed in village in Rajasthan in the last 10 years, only two could be located in areas inhabited by lower-caste people.
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- With a regular toilet requiring at least 20-30 litres of water in a day for smooth functioning, even obtaining a few litres every day is a struggle in these areas.
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- **Maintenance of toilets** - It is critical to ensure usage.
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What should be done?

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- It is essential to meet all the above shortcomings to achieve Swacch Bharat.
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- But it is to be remembered that eradicating open defecation would require much more than just meeting toilet construction targets.
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- Spending on toilet construction has steadily grown but the spending on the expenditure for behaviour change campaign activities is much less. In October, it constituted just 0.8% of the spending on construction of toilets.
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- Even that is limited to big billboards and advertisements.
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- But it has more to do with person to person engagement.
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- It is to be noted that the demand for toilets that will eliminate open defecation.
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- Therefore demand for toilets has to be created at local level and then people need to be made aware of sanitation.
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