Swachh Bharat Mission - Relook at Urban Approach

What is the issue?

- Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is being executed by two different ministries on Drinking Water and Sanitation (rural) and Housing and Urban Affairs (urban).
- Here is a look at SBM approaches in rural and urban areas, and the drawbacks in SBM (Urban).

What is the SBM approach in rural areas?

- The need for a dedicated sewerage network is less in rural areas as the toilets are connected with in-house soak pits.
- Domestic waste in rural areas is also managed in a much better manner.
- It is segregated at the household level and a majority of it is used in the fields.
- Thus, improving the cleanliness level in a rural area is much less complex than in an urban setup.
- However, the major challenge in rural areas is to change the mindset of the populace.
- Persuading them to start using household toilets rather than defecate in open areas is a challenging task.
- Notably, the majority of households do not have toilets in their homes.
- So, the main component of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) was to construct a household latrine.
- Another was to focus on information, education and communication (IEC) activities.

What is the case in urban areas?

- Disposal of solid waste has 3 key components - waste collection, transfer of the waste, and proper disposal at the landfill site.
- The task of waste collection and its transfer to the landfill site requires both manpower as well as an efficient transportation system.
- The segregation of waste can be either at the source or at the landfill.
- Segregation at source is more economical.
- At the landfill, it is done by either using high-end segregation plants or manual conveyors.

What are the challenges in this?

- **Solid waste** - In most urban areas, the disposal of solid waste is primarily the responsibility of municipalities.
- However, these municipalities are not equipped with the manpower, financial resources and technology for the task.
- Most of them are dependent upon the state governments for resources.
- These municipalities do not have sufficient human resources in terms of engineers or sanitation staff to manage the waste.
- Landfill site management is very poor due to lack of technical know-how.
- **Sewerage/liquid waste** - Another major challenge is to manage sewerage in urban areas.
- Merely constructing toilets cannot solve the problem, as urban areas require proper sewerage network.
- The soak pit system that works in rural areas cannot work in urban areas due to space constraint and increasing population density.
- The job of laying the sewerage network is again distributed between the state's public health engineering department and the municipalities.
- SBM (Urban) strategy's main focus is on the construction of individual household toilets, community toilets, public urinals and IEC activities.
- Worryingly, funds earmarked for solid waste management are minimal.
- Similarly, there is a limited provision of funds for laying the sewerage networks.
- Evidently, the strategy used for Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen) may not yield results in the urban mission.

What should be done?

- There is a need for revamping the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) wherein the focus is on solid waste and sewer management.
- The ministry must ask the state governments to assess their capabilities in waste handling.
- Sufficient funds must be provided for the collection of waste and its disposal.
- A window may be given to municipalities for upgrading their capabilities to augment their revenue collection.
- Separate funds must be given for the development of landfill sites.
- Best possible practices for waste collection across key cities must be studied and emulated.
- Adopting a piecemeal approach for constructing toilets and litter bins may not solve the systemic issue of waste disposal in cities.
- Besides behavioural change, bringing change in the way waste is disposed of by the municipalities and the state governments is essential.

Source: Indian Express

