

"Sanitation cannot be a separate ideal without reference to other forms of deprivation."

India's high-profile Swachh Bharat programme has won it plaudits globally for its goal of providing sanitation to all, but as new survey data from the National Statistical Office (NSO) show, it remains a work in progress. The quest to equip houses in the countryside with a toilet has led to an expansion, but there was a deficit of about 28% as of October last year and not 5% as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Gramin) had claimed.

The declaration that the country has ended open defecation in its rural areas, made to international acclaim on Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, must return to the wish list, going by this survey. It is extraordinary that many States that were declared to be free of open defecation simply did not qualify for the status, according to the NSO data.

The Centre has disputed the survey results, but it should ideally treat it as a fresh assessment of how much ground is yet to be covered. The data could help it review performance in States such as Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan, where 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 which have a strong influence on adoption of sanitation. It would be pointless to pursue sanitation as a separate ideal, if communities are unable to see its benefits due to overall deprivation.

The Central government has been reiterating its claims on rural India becoming entirely open defecation-free (ODF) on the basis of declarations made by States. Just last week, the Ministry of Jal Shakti said the coverage in 5,99,963 villages had risen from 38.7% in 2014, to 100% this year.

It is indisputable that the number of toilets has gone up significantly, and for which taxpayers remitted about ₹20,600 crore as a cess since 2015, until the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax. Yet, there is evidence to show

Table 1. Proportion of rural households having access to toilets, by State, 2012 and 2018, NSS surveys and administrative data

States	2012 (NSS)	2018 (NSS)	2018-19 (SBM-Gramin)
Andhra Pradesh	45.7	77.4	100
Arunachal Pradesh	87.4	98.4	98.9
Assam	86.3	97.5	99.9
Bihar	27.2	63.8	97.8
Chhattisgarh	23.3	91.4	99.9
Goa	90.3	81.5	89.3
Gujarat	41.3	75.8	99.5
Haryana	74.6	95.8	99.9
Himachal Pradesh	74.3	97.3	99.9
Jammu and Kashmir	55.7	85.2	99.9
Jharkhand	9.5	58.1	99.9
Karnataka	29.2	69.9	99.9
Kerala	72.0	99.6	100
Madhya Pradesh	21.0	71.0	100
Maharashtra	46.0	78.0	99.6
Manipur	88.0	100.0	99.9
Meghalaya	55.0	98.1	100
Mizoram	93.0	100.0	99.4
Nagaland	100.0	100.0	99.7
Odisha	18.7	49.3	87.1
Punjab	77.8	93.4	99.3
Rajasthan	27.0	65.8	99.9
Sikkim	98.0	100.0	100
Tamil Nadu	33.6	62.8	99.8
Telangana	45.7	77.5	88.1
Tripura	86.0	99.3	98.4
Uttar Pradesh	24.7	52.0	99.5
Uttarakhand	80.3	97.1	99.5
West Bengal	60.3	83.7	99.9

that this has not translated into use everywhere.

The NSO survey results add a new dimension, since they controvert data relied upon by the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on ODF. It will take a marathon programme to bring all-round development to India's villages, which have not really benefited from years of fast-paced economic growth.

Rural housing and water supply are key to bringing toilet access to all, and it is doubtful whether the 2.95 crore subsidised dwellings targeted to be built by 2022 under the government's flagship housing programme can bridge the shortfall. It is well-recognised that development indices are low in some States, and local bodies lack the capacity and resources to bring universal sanitation even where political will is present.

Sustained work to eliminate black spots in coverage and a massive urban programme are critical to ending open defecation and universalising toilet access.

Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

1. **Consider the following statements related to the new survey report of the National Statistical Office (NSO):**

1. According to this report, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand are the worst performing states, where not everyone has access to toilets.
2. It is found in this report that 29% rural household and 4% urban household do not have toilets

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) 1 and 2 (d) Nither 1 nor 2

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

Q. **Changing the attitude of the people beyond administrative, policy decisions is necessary to make India defecation free and make the Swachh Bharat Mission a complete success. Do you agree with this statement? Present your views with appropriate examples.** (250 words)

Note: Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 26 Nov., is 1 (b)