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# Rural Sanitation Programmes in India: An Overview of Initiatives, Challenges and Achievements

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## Abstract

Sanitation is crucial for enhancing public health, dignity, and quality of life, particularly in rural India, where almost 60% of the population lives. Even though the United Nations acknowledged clean water and sanitation as fundamental human rights in 2010, rural India still encounters major obstacles such as cultural taboos, insufficient water supply, inadequate infrastructure, and financial constraints. Over the years, the Government of India has initiated various programs, starting with the Central Rural Sanitation Programme (1986), followed by the Total Sanitation Campaign (1999), Nirmal Gram Puraskar (2004), Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (2012), and most recently, the Swachh Bharat Mission (2014). These programs are aimed not only at building infrastructure but also at fostering behavioral change and promoting sustainable sanitation practices. Significant advancements have been made: by 2024, nearly 90% of India's villages are expected to achieve Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus status, with considerable improvements in solid and liquid waste management. The establishment of over 39 million Individual Household Latrines (IHHLs) by 2023–24 further illustrates this progress. Nevertheless, the challenge of maintaining ODF Plus status remains, particularly due to maintenance issues, behavioral resistance, and socio-cultural hierarchies. These achievements underscore the importance of community engagement, sanitation education, and investment in infrastructure for long-term success. Looking ahead, ongoing innovation, policy backing, and behavioral change are vital to guarantee universal access and equity in sanitation. Thus, rural sanitation initiatives in India showcase both significant progress and the urgent need for a sustained commitment to achieve inclusive, hygienic, and dignified living conditions for everyone.

**Keywords:** Rural sanitation, Government initiative, Open Defecation Free (ODF), waste management.

## Introduction

In 2010, the UN General Assembly established access to safe and hygienic sanitation facilities and access to drinking water and toilets as fundamental rights, as they are "essential to the full enjoyment of life and all human rights." (United Nations 2010). This will therefore play an important role in maintaining public health, dignity, and welfare. The goal is to achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all and sanitation for all and to end open defecation by 2030. (UNICEF, 2018) Sanitation encompasses not only the absence of waste but also the provision of proper toilet facilities, including access to drinking water and connection to the drainage system. This is seen in rural India. According to the 2001 census, 21.9% of rural families had access to toilets. It increased to 32.7% in 2011, showing an average annual growth rate of 1%. Latrines and open latrines are a serious problem in rural areas. India is a developing country, and today India has a 60% rural population. Since independence, the country has been making special efforts to maintain clean water and sanitation for its people. Recognizing the need for cleanliness in urban as well as rural areas, the government has taken many steps.

The Government of India has launched several initiatives to tackle the sanitation crisis in rural areas, including the National Rural Sanitation Program (NRSP) and the Total Swachhta Abhiyan (TSC) Nirmal Gram Puraskar, Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan, and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBM). These programs aim to improve access to sanitation facilities, promote behavioral change, and enhance the overall quality of life for rural communities. Despite significant investment and effort, the effectiveness and sustainability of these programs are uncertain. This paper aims to provide an overview of rural sanitation programs in India, highlighting their salient features, challenges, and achievements.

### Objectives:

1. To study the major Rural Sanitation programs launched by the Government of India.
2. To study the rural sanitation in India.

### Research Methodology:

This research study is based on the secondary data collected from various Research Articles, Journals, newspapers, Government Reports, etc.

### Importance Of Sanitation:

Effective sanitation involves the correct disposal of human waste, the appropriate use of latrines, and the prevention of open defecation. It also includes the proper management of both solid and liquid waste. Inadequate sanitation is a leading cause of numerous fatal diseases. Maintaining good hygiene is crucial for various reasons, including personal, social, mental, and health-related aspects. Therefore, cleanliness plays a vital role in curbing the transmission of diseases and infections. Furthermore, the execution of safe sanitation practices, with active participation from the community and key stakeholders in both public and private sanitation at the household level, is deemed essential.

### Challenges Faced in Implementing Sanitation Programms in Rural Areas:

#### Social And Cultural Challenges:

1. **Behavioral change:** Long-standing habits concerning cleanliness and hygiene can hinder behavioral change. This issue persists as it is influenced by social networks such as caste and the general enhancement of living conditions.
2. **Social norms and taboos:** Sanitation is often a taboo subject, making it challenging to discuss and debate. Deep-rooted social norms and taboos around defecation pose a major obstacle to rural sanitation programs because they can prevent people from using toilets even when toilets are available, leading to people defecating in the open even when sanitation facilities are available.
3. **Cast and Social hierarchy:** Even today, in some rural areas, caste and social hierarchy can affect access to sanitation facilities and services. Social hierarchies and cast dynamics can affect patterns of toilet usage, as the same groups may encounter stigma or discrimination concerning sanitation practices.

#### Technical Challenges:

1. **Limited access to water:** sanitation facility construction and maintenance are hampered by inadequate water supplies. Lack of access to clean water is a major problem for rural sanitation programs because it makes it difficult for people to practice good hygiene

without a reliable source of water, which can lead to contamination and the spread of waterborne diseases.

2. **Poor infrastructure:** Rural areas often lack essential infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, to support sanitation programs.

### Financial Challenges:

1. **Limited Financial resources:** Rural households and communities often have limited resources to invest in sanitation facilities and services.
2. **Maintenance costs:** Sanitation facilities require regular maintenance, which can be costly and unsustainable.
3. **Lack of financial incentives:** The benefits of sanitation are often not immediately apparent, making it challenging to motivate households and communities to invest.

### Sanitation Programmes In India:

#### Central Rural Sanitation Programme - 1986 (CRSP):

CRSP was the first comprehensive sanitation program in India. The Center created a framework to address almost all issues related to rural sanitation. The need for toilets in schools and Anganwadis was also highlighted in the first sanitation program to provide a subsidy for toilet construction. The features were setting aside 25% of central funds for SC, ST Kuthumba, and mandating 3% of the total toilets constructed for the disabled. Key achievements included:

- Between 1986 to 1947, 43,37,609 toilets were constructed
- By 1991, rural sanitation had improved to 9.7 per cent.

#### Total Sanitation Campaign – 1999 (TSC):

In 1999, the Government of India launched the all India Swachhta mission as an amendment to the CRSP. The mission aimed to increase sanitation coverage in rural areas by ensuring the availability of toilets for everyone by 2012, thereby improving the overall living standers in these areas. By 2001, out of 138.2 million rural households in India, approximately 3.5 million households had constructed household toilets with the help of TSC by 2007. Significant achievements include: 332,05,896 household toilets, of which 196,13,529 were for persons below the poverty line. 3,82,683 school toilets, 1,17,664 Anganwadi toilets, 10276 community complexes, and 7057 production centers/Gramin Swachhta Marts (RSM).

#### Nirmal Gram Purskar – 2004 (NGP):

Nirmal Gram Purskar was a groundbreaking initiative by the Department of Drinking water Supply and Sanitation, part of the Ministry of Rural Development, aimed at attaining full sanitation coverage for Panchayat Raj Institutions. The program awards cash prizes to

Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayats, and organization that achieve complete cleanliness. This means they are free from Open Defecation and have effectively addressed issues related to liquid and solid waste management.

#### **Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan – 2012 (Nba):**

The primary goal of this initiative was to enhance sanitation conditions in rural regions. The program mainly aimed at generating greater momentum and implementing community driven strategies, which required individuals to spearhead a comprehensive cleanliness campaign to create a safe and hygienic environment. This campaign encompasses not just the development of infrastructure but also the promotion of awareness regarding cleanliness and the appropriate disposal of waste materials. Concurrently, the campaign emphasizes a 'community-led', 'people-centric', and 'demand-driven' approach. It seeks to transform rural India into a 'Pure India' by focusing on this strategy. Notable achievements included: Only 2.07 crore toilets were built from 2009-10 to 2013-14.

#### **Swachh Bharat Mission – 2014 (SBM):**

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is one of the most popular and important Abhiyan. By 2019, the dream of 'Swachh Bharat' was to be fulfilled by the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. To end open defecation and create public awareness about the loss of squatting, and encourage the use of toilets. The objective of the mission was to change the attitude, mentality, and behavior of the people for the proper use of sanitation. This included two campaigns, urban and rural.

#### **Swachh Bharat Mission for Rural Areas. 2014 to 2019:**

Around 10 crore toilets were constructed under the Swachh Bharat Mission Phase 1. By 2019, nearly 6 lakh villages have been designated as ODF.

#### **Swachh Bharat Mission (G) 2019 to 2025:**

On October 2, 2019, every Gram Panchayat announced that they are Open

Defecation Free. Under SBM (G) phase 2, the goal is to uphold the ODF status and focus on managing solid and liquid waste, enabling villages to progress from ODF to ODF Plus. The ODF Plus status is categorized into three distinct groups.

**ODF Plus (Aspiring):** A village that maintains its ODF status and has systems in place for managing solid waste or liquid waste.

**ODF Plus (Rising):** Every household and public facility is equipped with operational toilets, and the village has systems in place for managing both solid and liquid waste.

**ODF Plus (Model):** A village that maintains its ODF status and has systems in place for both Solid Waste Management and Liquid Waste Management; demonstrates visual cleanliness, meaning minimal litter, minimal stagnant wastewater, and no plastic waste accumulation in public areas; and showcases ODF Plus information, Education and Communication (IEC) messages.

The objective for every village is to attain ODF Plus – Model- status as soon as possible.

#### **Coverage of villages under solid and liquid waste management:**

The total number of registered villages as on 31/03/2023 is 5,85,439. Out of these, 3,02,265 villages have Solid Waste Management (SWM) facilities. Similarly, 4,67,664 villages have Liquid Waste Management (LWM) facilities.

#### **Progress of Individual Household Latrines and community sanitary construction:**

During the period of 2022-2023, a total of 27,28,264 Individual Household Latrines (IHHLs) were built, alongside 21,019 Community Sanitary Complexes (CSCs). In contrast, for the year 2023-2024 (up to March 2024), the number of IHHLs rose significantly to 39,00,970 while the count of CSCs experienced a minor drop to 15,844. This trend highlights a strong focus on enhancing household sanitation facilities, whereas the development of community complexes has witnessed a slight reduction this year.

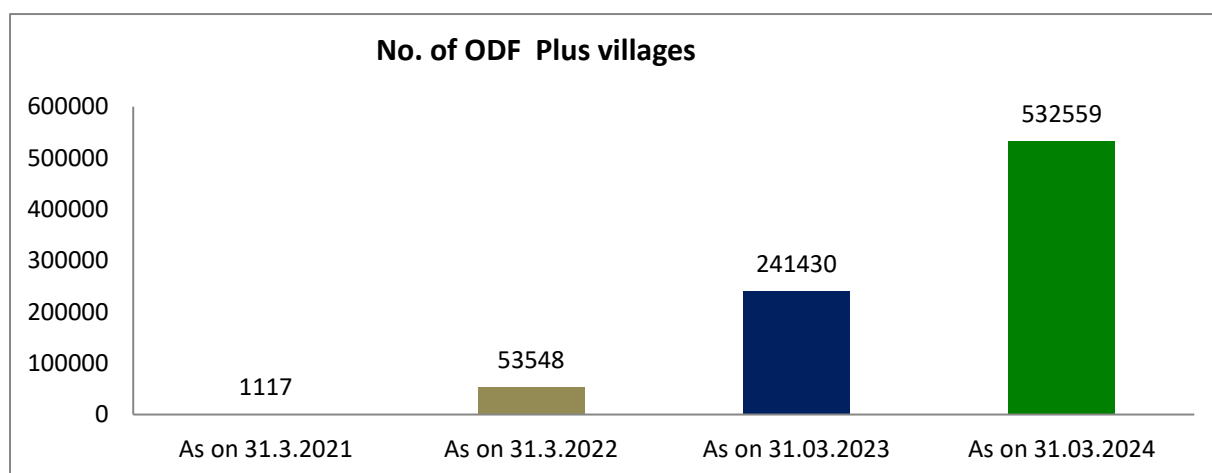
**Table-1 ODF plus Villages**

Years	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>ODF Plus Villages</b>	1117	53548	241430	532559

**Source: IMIS of SBM (G) Annual report 2023-2024**

The data indicate a significant rise in the number of ODF Plus villages over the years. In 2021, there were merely 1,117 villages classified under this category. This figure surged dramatically to 53,548 villages in 2022, demonstrating a robust commitment to enhanced sanitation. The momentum continued to build in 2023, reaching 241,430 villages, and by 2024, the total had

impressively escalated to 532,559 villages. This consistent growth highlights the government's ongoing initiatives and community involvement in achieving and sustaining Open Defecation Free Plus status, which guarantees not just access to toilets but also comprehensive sanitation, hygiene, and waste management.



*Source: IMIS of SBM (G) Annual report 2023-24.*

**State/UT-wise, villages declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus (As on 31/03/2024)**

S. No.	States/UT	No. of villages	Villages Aspiring	Villages Rising	Villages Model	Total ODF plus
1	A and N Islands	279	0	0	189	189
2	Andhra Pradesh	15,993	14,196	704	828	15,728
3	Arunachal Pradesh	5,145	3,195	885	540	4,620
4	Assam	25,327	19,264	4,351	1,599	25,214
5	Bihar	36,816	15,738	1,617	9,753	27,168
6	Chhattisgarh	19,611	11,566	1,625	5,126	18,317
7	D & N haveli and D & D	94	0	0	94	94
8	Gujrat	17,954	6,588	1,227	9,874	17,719
9	Goa	373	179	41	138	358
10	Himachal Pradesh	17,502	5,557	8,689	1,450	15,696
11	Haryana	6,626	4,628	410	1,228	6,266
12	Jharkhand	29,570	21,866	1,280	1,003	24,149
13	Jammu & Kashmir	5,735	0	0	5,726	5,726
14	Kerala	1,402	32	06	1,343	1,381
15	Karnatka	26,565	22,200	1,145	2,439	25,784
16	Lakshadweep	10	0	0	10	10
17	Ladakh	240	168	06	64	238
18	Maharashtra	40,473	17,496	1,012	13,330	31,838
19	Madhya Pradesh	50,726	12,241	715	36,652	49,608
20	Meghalaya	6,505	4,783	344	331	5,458
22	Mnipur	2,526	41	01	25	67
23	Mizoram	640	25	01	523	549
24	Nagaland	1,425	187	61	323	571
25	Odisha	46,772	20,156	215	19,643	40,014
26	Punjab	12,052	11,492	175	139	11,806
27	Puducherry	91	56	0	33	89
27	Rajasthan	43,146	27,881	6,546	7,323	41,650
28	Sikkim	400	0	0	396	396
29	Telangana	9,343	608	03	8,379	8,990
30	Tamil Nadu	12,122	5,224	3,432	2,923	11,579
31	Tripura	765	217	120	406	743
32	Uttarakhand	14,920	5,703	1,802	6,287	13,792
33	Uttar Pradesh	96,098	58,410	8,273	27,139	93,822
34	West Bengal	38,193	22,512	3,868	6,550	32,390
<b>Total</b>		<b>5,85,439</b>	<b>3,12,109</b>	<b>48,644</b>	<b>1,71,806</b>	<b>5,32,559</b>

*Source: SBM (g) IMIS*

The nation has reached yet another milestone through the Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen (SBM-G), with 90% of the villages across the country attaining ODF Plus status in the mission's second phase. The top performing states/UT in terms of 100% percentage of ODF Plus, as well as Model Villages, are- A & N Islands, D & N Haveli, D & D, Jammu & Kashmir, Lakshadweep, and Sikkim. These states and Union Territories have made significant strides in attaining the ODF Plus status, and their contributions have been crucial in achieving this milestone. ODF plus 20 states with above 90% of total villages are – Assam, Ladakh, Gujarat, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Puducherry, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Tripura, Rajasthan, Telangana, Goa, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh. These states & UTs are showing remarkable progress towards achieving ODF Plus status. 34% of total villages are ODF plus Model. Considering the previous four years, the number of ODF Plus villages in 2021 was 1,117 (0.19%) of the total villages. While in 2024 it increased to 5,32,559 (90%), the growth rate is seen from 2023 to 2024. Almost 51% of the total villages have solid waste management. 80% of the total villages have liquid waste management. That is, villages have made special progress in solid waste management.

### Conclusion:

Rural sanitation programs in India have made significant strides over the years, particularly with the launch of initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM). These programs have successfully raised awareness about the importance of sanitation, leading to improved access to toilets and better hygiene practices. However, challenges still remain in terms of sustaining these improvements, particularly in remote areas, due to socio-cultural barriers, lack of maintenance, and inadequate infrastructure. For the success of rural sanitation initiatives, it is essential to continue strengthening community involvement, ensuring regular maintenance of sanitation facilities, and addressing the behavioral changes needed to support long-term health and hygiene improvements. Further investments in education, financial support, and technology will also play a crucial role in achieving universal access to sanitation and improving the quality of life in rural areas.

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### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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