

Rural Sanitation

Access to sanitation is a basic human right that should be accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location. Sanitation is vital to public health and wellness and critical for building healthy and sustainable communities. The Government of Tamil Nadu has prioritised universal sanitation coverage to ensure all individuals have access to basic sanitation facilities and services. The topmost priority is sustaining the open defecation-free (ODF) status of village panchayats and improving solid and liquid waste management in all villages. The Government aims to address various challenges and barriers to achieving universal sanitation coverage while enhancing the overall health and well-being of rural communities.

A Historical Overview of Sanitation Initiatives in Tamil Nadu

Sanitation has been a significant challenge for rural areas in Tamil Nadu for several years. The State and Union Governments have implemented various initiatives over the years.

The first sanitation program for rural India was introduced in 1954 as a part of the First Five-Year Plan. However, the 1981 census showed that rural sanitation coverage was only 1%, prompting a greater emphasis on rural sanitation during the International Decade for Drinking Water and Sanitation (1981-90). The Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP) was launched in 1986 by the GOI to improve rural people's quality of life and provide privacy and dignity to women. GOI introduced the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) in 1999 to promote sanitation practices and construct household latrines. In 2012, the TSC was replaced by the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA), which focused on providing individual household latrines and community sanitary complexes and promoting sustainable sanitation practices. The Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) was launched in 2014, emphasizing ending open defecation and improving solid waste management.

Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen)- SBM(G)

To accelerate the efforts towards achieving universal sanitation, GOI launched the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) on October 2, 2014. The SBM has two phases - SBM Phase 1 (2014-2019) focused on constructing individual household toilets and community sanitary complexes, while SBM Phase 2 (2020-21 to 2024-25) aims to sustain and improve the gains of Phase 1. Tamil Nadu achieved ODF (open defecation-free) status in 2019.

The key objective of SBM(G) Phase II is to sustain the ODF status of villages and improve the cleanliness levels in rural areas through solid and liquid waste management activities, making villages 'ODF Plus' by ensuring the sustainability of the ODF status achieved in Phase 1. ODF Plus has been sub-categorised as 'Aspiring', 'Rising' and 'Model' villages. Aspiring villages have ODF sustainability and solid waste management only, while Rising villages have Liquid waste management along with ODF sustainability and solid waste management. Model Villages have ODF sustainability, solid and liquid waste management, visual cleanliness and IEC campaigns. The ultimate goal is for all villages to achieve Model status.

Components of SBM-G Phase -II

In addition to solid and liquid waste management, the scheme includes the construction of individual household latrines (IHHL), community sanitary complexes (CSC), plastic waste management units, Gobar-dhan, faecal sludge management plants (other than drain),. As per the SBM (G) Operational Guidelines for Phase II, all the program components, except for the IHHL component, are implemented in convergence with the 15th Finance Commission grant and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

Individual Household Latrines

Eligible households are given an incentive of Rs. 12,000 to construct Individual Household Latrines (IHHL). Around 1,55,830 new IHHLs are being constructed during 2022-23 to cover newly emerged households.

Community Sanitary Complexes (CSC)

An ODF Plus village is expected to have at least one CSC to cater to the sanitation needs of the floating population. These complexes should have separate facilities for men and women, with sufficient toilet seats, including one for the physically challenged, bathing cubicles, washbasins, and other necessary amenities. The CSC should be located in a place accessible and acceptable to all. The Mission has taken up the construction of 1,500 mini CSCs near public places, libraries, schools, and government buildings in 2022-23 to provide sanitation facilities in these areas.

Solid Waste Management

The solid waste management facilities established by all village panchayats in Tamil Nadu require continued efforts to ensure proper management. Waste audits are conducted in every village panchayat to analyse the types of waste produced, with more than 70% being biodegradable. For effective management in larger panchayats and peri-urban areas, 287 micro-composting centres (MCC) were established.

E-carts and pickup vehicles significantly contributed to effectively managing waste in larger panchayats and hilly areas. They promote proper disposal and reduce waste accumulation in public areas. As urbanisation spreads into peripheral regions, village panchayats are densely populated and require additional infrastructure such as e-carts and motorised vehicles to meet sanitation demands. These vehicles are procured based on the individual needs of panchayats.

Plastic Waste Management

SBM (G) Phase-II focuses on local-level plastic waste management and reducing single-use plastics. It provides Rs. 16.00 Lakhs to establish Block Level Plastic Waste Management Units run by SHGs to process plastic waste into value-added products like paver blocks and park benches. A 'Direct Plastic Buyback Policy' will promote household plastic recycling. PWMUs are being established one per block.

GOBAR-dhan

GOBAR-dhan aims to improve rural sanitation by transforming agro-waste into a valuable resource, converting animal waste, kitchen leftovers, crop residue, and market waste into biogas and bio-slurry. Under SBM (G) Phase-II, the project is eligible for a one-time grant of up to Rs.50.00 Lakh per district for the entire project period.

Grey Water Management activities

Liquid waste management activities in rural areas aim to address the indiscriminate flow of waste from households and public places like overhead tanks, hand pumps, and bore wells. To ensure comprehensive greywater management, mapping of existing infrastructure facilities, identification of necessary facilities, and funding arrangements have been undertaken in all 12,525 village panchayats. Under SBM (G) Phase-II, community soak pits, filters, constructed wetlands, root zone treatment and phytotrids are being constructed to prevent the stagnation of wastewater in public areas and ensure the effective handling of wastewater.

Soak Pits

Soak pits are an efficient way of managing household grey water and promoting water conservation in rural areas. They are constructed under MGNREGS and enable farmers to use the treated water for crop cultivation. Soak pits also help control mosquito breeding and promote groundwater recharge.

Cement Concrete Drainage

To channelise the grey water flow, the construction of cement concrete drainage has been taken up. The drains are disposed into horizontal/vertical filters, constructed wetlands, Phytotrids, etc., for treatment.

Faecal Sludge Management

The panchayats will coordinate with urban local bodies (ULB) to effectively manage faecal sludge and prevent water body contamination. SBM(G) will undertake faecal sludge management in panchayats that are peri-urban, densely populated and in those with more septic tanks and single-leach pit toilets. Necessary steps have been taken to sign a MoU with the urban local bodies to ensure co-treatment with existing sewage treatment plants (STP) /Faecal Sledge Treatment Plants (FSTP) units for de-canting faecal sludge from rural areas.

Under faecal sludge management (FSM) initiatives, cluster mapping was conducted for 12,525 village panchayats with 649 ULBs. The mapping revealed that 9,344 panchayats could be clustered under phases I to IV with the nearest STPs and FSTPs. As phase I is already operational, 1,817 village panchayats will be clustered with ULBs and designated disposal facilities. Phase II and III will cluster 7,527 village panchayats with treatment facilities under construction or proposed for

co-treatment. The remaining 3,181 village panchayats, which are not covered under phases I to III, will be covered by new rural FSTPs under SBM (G) as phase IV.

Thooimai Kaavalars

Thooimai Kaavalar, employed by Village Poverty Reduction Committees (VPRCs) or Panchayat Level Federations (PLFs), is responsible for solid waste management activities in village panchayats, including door-to-door waste collection, transportation, and segregation. There are currently 66,130 Thooimai Kaavalar in all 12,525 village panchayats, and each is responsible for 150 households, earning a monthly salary of Rs.3,600. Increasing their numbers will be based on the increase in households to ensure the cleanliness and hygiene of village panchayats.

Inter-Personal Communication (IPC) through Motivators

Approximately 12,000 motivators selected from SHGs/PLFs are trained to promote effective IPC at the grassroots level. They disseminate information on toilet usage, waste management, and hygiene practices, and visit schools, Anganwadi centres, and primary health centres to collaborate with stakeholder departments. Motivators' activities are tracked via the 'Thooimai Thamizhagam' mobile application, and incentives are based on performance.

Namma Ooru Superu Campaign

The 'Namma Ooru Superu' campaign is conducted every second and fourth Saturday, across all village panchayats. It is aimed to promote a change in behaviour within the rural community by raising awareness about sanitation and solid and liquid waste management practices while encouraging the continuation of these behaviours.

During the campaign period, garbage hotspots, public places, schools, Govt. buildings/institutions, water bodies, community sanitary complexes, drains, etc., are cleaned with active community participation. Motivators and SHG/PLF members undertake awareness activities in schools and colleges. Trees are planted during the campaign.

Convergence

Sanitation works can be taken up not only under SBM (G) funds but also in convergence with various schemes such as 15th CFC, MGNREGS, AGAMT II, MLACDS, NNT, MPLADS, etc., As per the guidelines issued by DDWS, GoI, any SBM (G) works related to SWM and LWM may be taken up only in convergence with 30% of 15th CFC funds. The village panchayats may take standalone sanitation works under 15th CFC funds based on the requirements. Only when the Village Panchayats exhaust the threshold funds allocated under SBM (G) and the 15th CFC tied component for Sanitation, Village Panchayats may take up Sanitation works under MGNREGS. Once the Village Panchayat exhaust the allocation under SBM (G), the 15th CFC tied component for Sanitation and MGNREGS funds, those Village Panchayats may utilize other convergence schemes providing Sanitation works.