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Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation

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The Swachh Bharat Mission is the largest behaviour change programme in the world. Through mobilization of rural communities, the SBM (Gramin) has truly turned into a jan andolan, a people's movement. As per a progress update shared in the capital today, over 6 crore toilets have been built across rural India under the Mission. Two independent surveys by the Quality Council of India in 2017, and National Sample Survey Organization in 2016, have pegged the usage of these toilets at 91% and 95% respectively. As an outcome, over 3 lakh villages and 300 districts have been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF), across ten States and Union Territories, namely, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Chandigarh and Daman & Diu.

The progress update was shared by the Secretary, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Shri Parameswaran Iyer today during a technical briefing given to the media in New Delhi.

Terming this a "Sanitation Revolution in Rural India", Shri Iyer said that 15 States/UTs are expected to be declared ODF by March 2018, and with this accelerating progress, the Mission is on track to achieve an ODF India by October 2019. He also shared some studies done by international agencies that estimate the health and economic impact of sanitation on a rural family. UNICEF estimates that the lack of sanitation is responsible for the deaths of over 100,000 children in India annually. A Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation study estimates that households in ODF villages in India have significantly better health indicators.

Another UNICEF study estimates that a household in an ODF village in India saves Rs.50,000 every year by way of disease treatment costs averted, saving of livelihood by not falling ill, etc. At the macro level, a 2007 World Bank study estimated that lack of sanitation costs India over 6% of our GDP.

Shri Iyer announced that the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation will be launching a mass media campaign to promote the twin pit toilet soon. A twin pit toilet is a toilet model that is economical, safe, easy to clean, eco-friendly, and is effectively a self-contained waste treatment plant that does not harm the ground water beneath the toilet.

Speaking on the issue of solid and liquid waste, he said that there was a paradigm shift underway in the way the Mission looks at this issue. He said that the Mission is moving from seeing it as a Solid Liquid Waste Management issue to seeing it as Solid and Liquid Resource Management, because waste is a resource that can be tapped and converted to wealth and energy.

Speaking on the issue of drinking water in rural India, he said that there have been a number of initiatives to reform the National Rural Drinking Water Programme. He enumerated several steps to improve the speed and quality of implementation of the Programme, especially targeting arsenic and fluoride-affected habitations.

Shri Iyer also shared some stories of champions of Swachh Bharat from the field, including women, children, differently abled and senior citizens, who have contributed immensely to the sanitation mission through their dedication to cleanliness. These champions have gone beyond their call of duty to make Swachh Bharat a true jan andolan.

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