

UPTICK FOR INDIA ON SANITATION IN UN REPORT

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

In rural India, only 32% of the population have access to piped water, less than half of the 68% who have access in urban India.

“Drinking water is now the highest priority of the development agenda for this government,” said Drinking Water and Sanitation Secretary Parameswaran Iyer.

The contours of a new scheme, tentatively called Nal Se Jal, are being drafted this month.

With regard to sanitation, India’s record has been better. The country is responsible for almost single-handedly dragging the world towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal of ending open defecation. The South Asian region, including India, accounted for almost three-fourths of the population who stopped defecating in the open between 2000 and 2017, according to the report. Of the 2.1 billion people who gained access to basic sanitation services over this time period globally, 486 million live in India.

“India’s Swachh Bharat mission has been an example and inspiration to other countries, especially in Africa, but also East and South Asia,” said Mr. Iyer. “Nigeria sent a delegation to study the programme... We believe our programme had four reasons for its success that we can share with the rest of the world: political leadership, public financing, partnerships and people’s participation.”

The millions of new toilets which mark the progress of the Swachh Bharat mission are, however, producing large amounts of solid and liquid waste that India simply does not have the ability to treat and dispose of safely. According to the report, only 30% of the country’s wastewater is treated at plants providing at least secondary treatment, in comparison to an 80% global average.

“Solid and liquid waste management will be the focus of Swachh Bharat phase 2. We will launch the roadmap and strategy for that programme next month,” said Mr. Iyer.

“The human right to sanitation implies that people not only have a right to a hygienic toilet but also have a right not to be negatively affected by unmanaged faecal waste. This is most relevant to poor and marginalised groups who tend to be disproportionately affected by other people’s unmanaged faecal sludge and sewage,” says the report, highlighting inequalities beyond toilet access.

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