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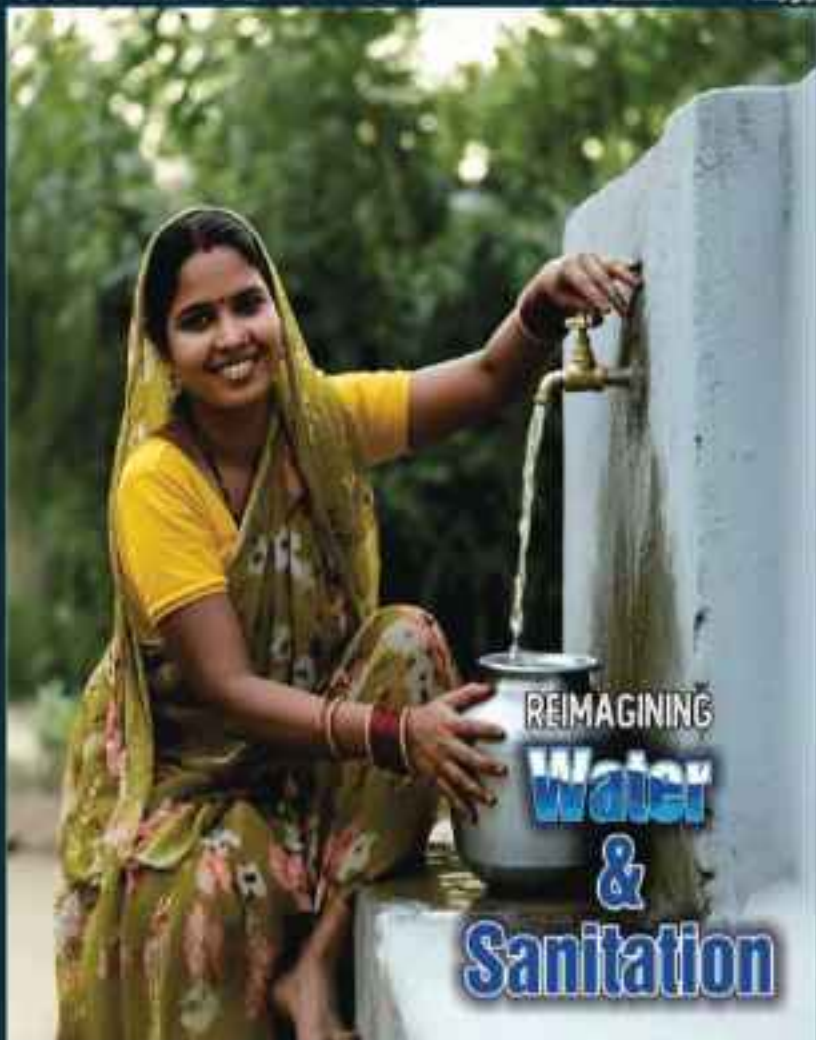


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WASHing away woes New Era of Health and Dignity

Lexaude de Vire's words, "Wash is the driving force of all change," resonates deeply in the context of India's significant progress in the domain of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). Once a distant aspiration for millions—access to safe water, adequate sanitation, and hygiene practices is steadily becoming a lived reality, owing to the government's sustained initiatives and community participation.

The impact of WASH initiatives has been profound and multidimensional. Access to clean water has dramatically reduced the burden of waterborne diseases. Improved sanitation facilities have restored dignity and safety, particularly for women and girls. Programmes like the *Swachh Bharat Mission* and *Har Ghar Jal* have been instrumental in this journey.



One of the most transformative initiatives has been the *Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)*, launched in 2014 with the vision of a 'Clean India'. The campaign went beyond infrastructure to become a people's movement. It focused on eradicating open defecation through the construction of over 1.18 million toilets across rural and urban India, while also promoting behaviour change.

Complementing this has been the *Jal Jeevan Mission's* *Har Ghar Jal* programme which aims to ensure functional household tap connections, thereby reducing drudgery and improving quality of life. The *Swachhagrahis* and *Jal Saktis*, local volunteers, along with Village Water and Sanitation Committees, have become the backbone of this movement. Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) campaigns have strengthened local participation and women's empowerment, unleashing the power of community-led change.

The government has also embraced technology and innovation. From water quality monitoring through IoT-based systems to promoting decentralised waste management and faecal sludge treatment plants, there is a conscious shift towards sustainable, long-term solutions. Moreover, the integration of water conservation campaigns such as *Jal Shakti Akshay* underscores the holistic approach—where supply, conservation, and management work in tandem.

However, the path forward is not without its challenges. The sustainability of water sources and the long-term maintenance of sanitation infrastructure require continuous effort. The recent Union Budget's focus on this sector is a welcome signal, reinforcing the government's resolve to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, the true success of this mission will be measured by the actions of every citizen. As India moves forward on this collective journey, it is essential to remember that the WASH movement is not only about infrastructure—it is about creating a culture of cleanliness, responsibility, and inclusiveness.

This issue of *Yojana* delves into the complexities of this journey, featuring the insights of policymakers and practitioners who are shaping India's WASH landscape. Their experiences highlight the triumphs and tribulations of this monumental task, inspiring us to continue pushing the boundaries. Every drop of water, every toilet maintained, and every act of hand-washing is a step towards a healthier, more dignified, and prosperous *Wast Bharat*. □



Swachh Bharat Mission (G) & Jal Jeevan Mission Paving way for Viksit Bharat @2047

Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) and Jal Jeevan Mission represent a continuum, where sanitation and water converge to advance public health, uphold dignity, and enable rural transformation. Their most enduring legacy may lie not in infrastructure or services, but in governance itself, set on the principle of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Prayas.



An ODF Plus Model Village in Thrissur

In 2014 and 2019, the Government of India launched two of the most defining interventions in the rural development landscape – Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) and Jal Jeevan Mission. Neither initiative was framed merely as a service-delivery mechanism for sanitation or drinking water; instead, they represented a recalibration of

governance paradigms aimed at correcting long-standing deficits in public health infrastructure and institutional responsiveness in rural India.

Aligning with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's motto of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Prayas", Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) [SBM-G] and Jal Jeevan Mission [JLM] together

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essentially, how participatory governance can drive India's journey toward *Water for People* (WFP) 2047—a future in which India reaches the centenary of its independence as a developed, inclusive, and resilient nation. At the core of both Missions lies a marked departure from traditional top-down delivery models. The emphasis has shifted decisively towards participatory governance—embedding local institutions, behaviour change, and last-mile service delivery into the very design of development.

The government has kept *Jal Bhagiat*¹ at the core of every aspect of SBM-G and BM, ensuring that communities lead decision-making rather than merely receive services. By placing citizens at the centre of planning, implementation, and operations, the government has transformed these Missions into genuinely people-owned and people-managed initiatives, where the strength of collective responsibility sustains both services and behaviour long after initial construction.

Sustaining the Sanitation Revolution

India celebrated a decade of *Swachh Bharat Mission* (Gramin) last year, and the Mission's success story is not only richer in improved health and sanitation metrics but also in the reimagining of sanitation as a symbol of dignity, equity, and national resolve. From declaring India as open defecation free to embedding behaviour change in rural cultures, the journey of SBM-G has transformed the relationship between the citizen and the state.

The *Swachh Bharat Mission* (Gramin) catalysed a nationwide shift in sanitation coverage, taking it from 39% in 2014 to 100% in 2019. The mission was different, as it created decentralised systems that adapted to the needs of local communities, with an objective of creating an ownership in the community where sanitation was understood, owned, and sustained at the village level itself.

SBM Phase II, launched in 2020-21, deepened this transformation with a focus on achieving ODF Plus Model (Open Defecation Free) status across all villages. ODF Plus Model villages mean villages meeting ODF goals, managing solid and liquid waste responsibly, and promoting menstrual hygiene as a rural standard. As of 21 July 2023, more than 96% of India's villages are



declared ODF Plus. With 478 lakh villages categorised as ODF Plus Model. This growing momentum positions sanitation not merely as an infrastructure drive, but as a societal shift towards a better well-being.

While SBM-G redefined the rural landscape, the *Jal Jeevan Mission* launched in 2019, carried forward this transformative journey by ensuring that the gains of sanitation were complemented with access to safe drinking water. Together these two flagship Missions represent a continuum where sanitation and water converge to advance public health, uplift dignity and enable rural transformation.

Jal Jeevan Mission has expanded access to clean drinking water, achieving over 15.67 crore functional household tap connections as of 21 July 2023.

This milestone, crossing 80% rural coverage, is particularly significant given India's diverse geography and the hydrological challenges faced in regions such as the Himalayas, the Himalayan belt, the Deccan plateau, the Eastern Ghats, and so on. The Mission's steady progress in such areas speaks to its operational resilience and capacity for adaptive implementation.

A notable transformation lies in the assertion of community ownership. *Gram Panchayats* and *Village Water & Sanitation Committees* (VWSCs) were tasked not just with participation, but with co-lead responsibilities, from planning and operations to monitoring and maintenance. Over 24 lakh women have been trained in using Field Testing Kits to check water quality, signalling a profound shift in the gendered dynamics of rural governance. Women who once walked miles for water now manage water systems as *Jal Sakhs* or *Jal Sahasins*. In schools, the idea of *Jal*

Dares—students who promote water consciousness—has found meaningful traction.

Under JMV, piped water supply has been extended to schools and anganwadis centres, creating healthier, safer and more dignified environments for children. With reliable access to drinking and washing water, girls no longer leave school due to inadequate hygiene facilities. Instead, fundraising visits and water point routine attendance, promote proper hygiene practices, and advance gender equity, amplifying the Mission's broader impact.

Profound Impact

SBM-G and JMV have had significant impact, which have been studied by various organisations of repute. Nobel Laureate Dr Michael Kremer's research suggests that universal access to safe water could reduce infant mortality by up to 30%, saving approximately 1.36 lakh children under the age of five annually. A WHO (World Health Organization) report presents that JMV could prevent 4 lakh diarrhoeal deaths, save over 5.5 crore hours daily in rural India (primarily women's time), and generate economic benefits of over ₹6.28 lakh crore. Employment studies indicate the Mission could create nearly 60 lakh person-years of direct jobs and over 2 crore person-years of indirect employment during the construction phase alone.

Under SBM-G, as per the WHO Report (2018), 3 lakh diarrhoeal deaths were avoided in 2019 compared to 2014. The study done by UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) in February 2020 on the impact of SBM-G on the convenience, safety and self-respect of women in rural India indicated that the increased access to household toilets has led to the improvement in the *Swachh* (cleanliness), *Aarogya*

(safety) and *Sambhava* (well-being) of women in rural India. As per a study done by UNICEF during 2018-19 in seven selected villages, groundwater sources were likely to be 12.7 times less contaminated in the ODF villages as compared to non-ODF villages. The study by March 2024 highlighted SBM has contributed significantly to reducing infant and under-five mortality rates across the country—averaging 62,100 – 70,100 infant lives annually.

These figures are mirrored by field experiences. In some districts, dominant water schemes have been revived through collective mobilisation by the Gram Panchayats. In remote regions, tribal communities have built localised systems for water testing and distribution. In several states, women have been trained as pump operators, disrupting established hierarchies and redrawing contours of technical competence at the grassroots.

A SMART Vision for the Future of SBM-G

In order to realise the ambitions of *Atari Bharat* (2047), calls for a SMART approach — integrating Sustainability, Making women central, Accelerating private sector involvement, Re-establishing modernisation protocols, and Technological and training interventions into the very core of sanitation programming.

S: Sustainability of Assets and Behaviours

The transition from infrastructure creation to systems management is a crucial shift in SBM-G and JMV's trajectory. Sustainable sanitation means not only toilets that work but also behaviour that persists. It will ensure that assets created, whether bio-toilets, soak pits, or compost pits, are used, cleaned, repaired, and managed and functional over the long term. This would require robust O&M (Operation and Maintenance) protocols, funding mechanisms at Gram Panchayat levels, and technological innovations in track usage. State states, like Odisha and Kerala, are demonstrating how community-led operation and maintenance models can be replicated across the country. Greywater reuse systems in Tamil Nadu and soak pit standardisation in Rajasthan are early indicators that sustainability when locally owned, leads to self-reinforcing cleanliness.

M: Making Women Central to Development

Women have long been the backbone of rural WASH (water, SBM-G and JMV). The mission's most profound gender impact is not only improved safety and dignity but also economic empowerment and leadership. Over



Individual household toilet with deep pit in Rajasthan



the years, lakhs of Aaral Akhri, Swachhagrahi, SuG members, and Jai Sahas have emerged as grassroots champions, building toilets, operating treatment units, and leading TSC campaigns.

Going forward, the focus will be on institutionalising this empowerment by inserting it in government-led sanitation enterprises, whether through SuG-empowered sanitary pad units in Odisha or SuG-led OSM contracts for Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants in Telangana. Making sanitation a source of employment, income, and leadership for rural women shall turn SuG into a vehicle for true gender justice.

A: Accelerating Private Sector Involvement

Private innovation has immense potential to bolster SuG-C outcomes, especially in waste management and circular economy solutions. While early pilots in plastic waste collection and SuGARhub-based biogas (Gobarwastu Organic Bio-Agro Resource Chain) units are encouraging, the need now is for structured partnerships that bring scale, sustainability, and investment. The mission shall look into exploring new models of corporate engagement co-branding of products with Swachh Bharat themes, rural sanitation incubators, and CSR-funded infrastructure projects. States like Maharashtra and Odisha are leading the way by integrating SuGARhub units with local clusters and creating slum value chains, linking sanitation directly with rural economic value.

B: Re-establishing Communication Protocols

The success of SuG-C is deeply tied to its communication strategy and its ability to turn insights from lakhs to grids. Moving forward, the messaging

must evolve to focus on complex behaviour shifts like toilet usage, pit emptying, safe disposal of menstrual waste, and segregation of solid waste. The upcoming strategy must deploy hyper-local digital nudges, school-based sanitation clubs, rural market creosols, and WhatsApp-driven campaigns. Platforms like SuG Academy and WhatsApp Audio Lessons, launched in 2025, are promising models to democratise learning and build a culture of continuous engagement.

C: Training and Technological Interventions

To meet the evolving demands of rural WASH across SuG and SuG-C, we shall equip our first cohorts with cutting-edge training and tools. Sanitation workers, masons, Gram Panchayat members, and district functionaries must have access to real-time knowledge on sustainability, innovation, and climate-linked sanitation practices. The move toward smart sanitation villages—which integrate real-time monitoring of toilets, digitised waste collection, and solar-powered STPs (Sewage Treatment Plants)—is no longer a futuristic idea. It is already underway in states like Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. The goal must be to institutionalise digital tools and climate-resilient practices into rural sanitation.

Repeal the Tap

The Union Budget 2025-26 has scheduled the Jal/Jeeva Mission till 2028. This extension is not simply about achieving sanitation; it emphasises sustainability. The next phase will focus on ensuring long-term functionality, securing water sustainability, improving operations and maintenance systems, and adapting to climate realities through innovations like springhead management, greywater reuse, and rainwater harvesting.

This evolution also reflects a broader institutional shift. Convergence across ministries, sectors, and stakeholders, is no longer an abstract goal but a governing principle. The Ministries of Health, Education, Women & Child Development, and Rural Development are increasingly aligned in numbers and metrics, creating a more integrated and sustainable development architecture.

At the heart of this transformation lies Jai Bhagwan—the spirit of collective ownership and local participation. Guided by the message of Astronomer Bharti, it realises that self-reliance has always been part of India's economic DNA. When communities plan their own water supply systems or operate and

maintain sanitation infrastructure, they generate a multiplier effect, enhancing not just WASH outcomes, but also education, health, livelihoods, and dignity.

As India sets its sights on Vision 2047, JIM is poised to evolve from a water provision initiative to a comprehensive rural water governance ecosystem. The next phase will be defined by four strategic shifts:

From Tap Coverage to Water Security

As JIM transitions from infrastructure creation to sustained service delivery, source sustainability has become a cornerstone of its long-term success. To ensure the year-round availability of safe drinking water, the Mission is placing renewed emphasis on water budgeting and source strengthening at the village level. Key interventions such as hydro-geological mapping, strengthened development in Himalayan regions, aquifer recharge, and rainwater harvesting are now central to the plan.

Recognising the critical link between source security and service reliability, the Ministry of Jal Shakti has anchored Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain (JSA CTR) and Jal Sochay Jee Bhagipati (JSJB) as key enablers for groundwater recharge, spring rejuvenation, and rainwater harvesting – interventions that directly impact the functionality and reliability of piped water supply systems across JIM.

JSA-CTR, with the theme 'Catch the Rain, where it falls, when it falls' has seen convergence across departments and communities to construct and rejuvenate habits of water conservation structures, from percolation tanks and check dams to rooftop harvesting systems, especially in water-stressed blocks. These interventions not only augment water availability at the local level but also reduce the dependence on single-point or depleting sources, a critical challenge in sustaining household tap connections across seasons.

Complementing this, JSJB has brought visibility and scale to community-led water management. The initiative has

made way for good practices, local innovations, and a culture of *Jee Bhagipati* – the spirit that lies at the heart of JIM.

Together, JSA CTR and JSJB are not peripheral additions; they are integral to JIM's core objective of *Jee Dhar Jee*. By strengthening water sources, empowering communities, and mainstreaming water budgeting at the village level, these campaigns are helping ensure that every rural household receives clean drinking water – every day on a long-term, sustainable basis.

From Infrastructure to Innovation

Rural India is increasingly deploying smart water solutions from IoT-based sensors to real-time water quality monitoring dashboards accessible to Gram Panchayats. By 2047, India will aim for climate-smart water villages that manage water with precision and accountability.

From Beneficiaries to Co-Creators

The future of JIM lies in the hands of *Jee Doots*, *Jee Seetaks*, and *Jee Sahayaks* – people who don't just use water systems but take charge of them, care for them, and ensure they serve every household, every day.

From Silos to Synergy

Water intersects with health, education, agriculture, and nutrition. The future vision of JIM lies in converging sectors, reducing anarchy in children through safe water and hygiene, increasing school attendance among girls, and improving household nutrition through kitchen gardens irrigated by treated greywater.

ODF Plus Villages			
Total Districts	Total Blocks	Total Gram Panchayats	ODF Villages
761	7,154	2,58,322	5,87,047
ODF Plus villages	ODF Plus Model	ODF Plus Model (if full scale)	ODF Plus Model (if full scale)
+18 5,65,948	+18 4,70,834	+18 3,22,963	+18 19,654
ODF Plus Institutions			
Villages having arrangement of Solid Waste Management		Villages having arrangement of Liquid Waste Management	
+18 5,18,238		+18 5,32,483	

Source: JIM-C Dashboard as of 30 July 2023

Har Ghar Jal Status ①

Certified States/UTs: Goa, A & N Islands, Puducherry, D&N and D&D, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab

Reported States/UTs: Telangana, Mizoram, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat

Districts		Blocks		Panchayats		Villages	
Reported ①	Certified ②	Reported ③	Certified ④	Reported ⑤	Certified ⑥	Reported ⑦	Certified ⑧
190	112	1,906	950 (11)	1,23,570	85,551 (148)	2,62,595	1,67,048 (153)

Source: JN Sanctioning (M) July 2021

Alignment with SDG 2030

The two missions in rural WASH sit squarely at the heart of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 6: "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all" by 2030, interlinked with other SDGs. By 2030, India's robust strides under SBM-G and JAM will not only fulfil its SDG 6 targets but also catalyse progress across the wider 2030 Agenda. Demonstrating how well-governed, community-powered WASH programmes can accelerate a nation's journey toward sustainable, inclusive development.

The most enduring legacy of SBM-G and JAM may lie not in infrastructure or services, but in governance itself, set on the principle of *Jabha Duan, Sabha Wakes, Jabha Mukam, Jabha Prapaz*. These missions have expanded the scope of what Panchayats and communities can do when empowered with agency, trust, and tools. The idea that local institutions can own and operate critical infrastructure is no longer aspirational; it is a lived and proven reality.

As India approaches its century of independence, the vision of *Vikas Bhumi* may rest on this foundation: girls who attend school without fear of headscarf sanitation; women who no longer walk miles for water; and citizens who do not wait for the state but become active participants in shaping their own futures.

The principle of *no one is left behind* is being realised across the country. Under SBM-G, more than 5.65 lakh villages are now categorised as GDF Plus and more than 4.70 lakh villages as GDF Plus Model.

Over 5.18 lakh villages in the country now have *Jalad Waste Management Systems*, and more than 1.32 lakh villages have *Liquid Waste Management Systems*.

Similarly, under JAM, 390 districts, 1,916 blocks, over 1.23 lakh *Gram Panchayats*, and more than 2.62 lakh villages have achieved *Har Ghar Jal*.

A key pillar of this transformation is the concept of *Swachh Sajaal Gao*—villages where all rural households and public institutions (such as schools, Anganwadi Centres, Panchayat Ghats, and community toilets) are provided with safe and adequate drinking water, and where the villages have sustained their Open Defecation Free status and achieved GDF Plus Model verification. As of now, 1,9,981 villages have achieved this status. The goal is to enable every village to become a *Swachh Sajaal Gao*, ensuring prosperity and well-being across India's vast and diverse rural landscape.

The enduring legacy of SBM-G and JAM is that systems can shift when society aligns with purpose. The next chapter of rural WASH must build on this foundation, one that empowers Panchayats, repositions women, renews innovation, and migrates climate resilience into water and sanitation.

India's rural WASH story is not over. It is simply entering its most critical and catalytic phase. The road ahead demands vigilance on inclusion, sustainability, and on deepening participation. And as we march towards 2047, it is this phase that will define whether we remain a service delivery state or become a truly self-reliant *Swachh and Shat Bharat*. □



WASH for Women, WASH for the Nation

India's rural sanitation and water supply landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation, with rural women emerging as active custodians and change-makers. Women have emerged as the driving force behind sustained WASH outcomes—mobilising communities, managing infrastructure, and promoting sanitation practices. Jal Jeevan Mission has redefined both governance and gender roles, proving that when women lead, communities thrive.

Over the past decade, India's rural sanitation and water supply landscape has undergone a remarkable transformation. At the heart of this transformation is the growing leadership of rural women who are not merely users of the services but are active custodians and change-makers. The growth and evolution we witness today have undergone significant changes over the years.

At the heart of these rural WASH missions lies Jan Bhagidari, people's participation, which has transformed sanitation and water from a government scheme into a true Jan Aashin. It is this collective ownership that ensures lasting change on the ground.

Women's Leadership in WASH

The gendered dimensions of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) are deeply intertwined in social norms, often confining women and girls to invisible routines of care from fetching water to managing household sanitation. These expectations limit their access to education, livelihoods, and personal agency. They face unique challenges during menstruation, pregnancy and menopause, which impact their health, education, safety and overall quality of life. It is understood that improvements in water, sanitation and hygiene are vital for everyone's wellbeing, but they are particularly significant for women and girls.

True transformation happens when communities come together. Women's leadership in WASH has

not emerged in isolation. It is rooted in the spirit of Jan Bhagidari, where the success of rural water and sanitation interventions depends on people's collective will and participation. It is this inclusive approach that turns beneficiaries into active stakeholders and ensures community-led sustainability.

In rural India, women are still often responsible for collecting water, managing household hygiene, and ensuring sanitation for children and the elderly. According to the NFHS-5 (2019-21) (National Family Health Survey), over 67% of rural households have water on their premises or delivered to their dwelling, compared to 86% in urban areas. This means that approximately 32% of rural households did not have water readily available within their premises or delivered to their dwelling.

- Under SJM Phase 1, there was construction of over 17 crore individual household toilets over a five-year period, taking sanitation coverage from 89% in 2014 to 100% in 2019. As of date (21 July 2025), 1.75 crore toilets have been built since the launch of SJM-G Phase 1, and over 5.18 lakh villages have arrangements of Solid Waste Management, and 4.32 lakh villages have arrangement of Liquid Waste Management.
- Under JH, 12.48 crore households have been provided with tap water connections since the launch of the mission, now covering over 15.67 crore rural households as on 21 July 2025.

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In Bihar's Mazadarpur District, SBM women manage rural 'Toilet Clinics,' providing minor toilet repairs for a nominal fee, an innovation that addresses both sustainability and livelihood generation.



Bihar: SBM-G-Toilet Clinic in action

Even though women are primary stakeholders, they were largely absent from decision-making roles in WASH governance until recent years. The rollout of SBM-G and JN has sought to change this. Both these transformative programmes not only recognise women as central to behaviour change and service delivery but also formally include them in institutional frameworks. The evolution of the programme design over the years has also moved from providing technical solutions to addressing both practical gender needs and strategic gender interests for achieving transformative changes. There is evidence of gender-focused WASH programming as an enabler for achieving programme sustainability, economic gains, and improved outcomes.

Both programmes developed comprehensive operational and programme guidelines to ensure that every step of India's WASH initiatives includes dignity and safety for all genders as a key cornerstone. It emphasised not only the need for women's participation in the planning and implementation of sanitation interventions but also their leadership in both SBM and JN when they proposed that 50% of members of Village Water and Sanitation Committees should be women. As a result, women have stepped into roles once off-limits to them, their active involvement in

water and sanitation has grown substantially and they have demonstrated strong abilities in managing the resources and raising awareness in the community.

The experience from SBM-G and JN has seen women emerge as the driving force behind sustained WASH outcomes, be it through motivating their communities as *Spandhagras* or discouraging open defecation and promoting sanitation practices through *Alpana Committees* in SBM-G Phase 1, or testing water quality as *Jal Sahayak* or managing rural WASH infrastructure as members of *Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSCs)* and *Self-Help Groups (SHGs)*.

The essential work has been made possible with community participation that has anchored the change to the involvement of relevant stakeholders.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

There are SHGs that are playing an expanding role in WASH interventions. In several states for SBM-G & JN, SHGs have taken over operations of community sanitary complexes, ensuring cleanliness, sewer line collection, and minor repairs. These grassroots networks and peer-support mechanisms have also sustained behaviour-change efforts and have

In Odisha and Uttar Pradesh, SHGs support the door-to-door collection and segregation of solid waste in the Plastic Waste Management Unit established at the Green AshaArya under the CSR Plus framework.



Odisha door-to-door collection and segregation of solid waste

reinforced the synergy between women's economic empowerment and rural infrastructure development, demonstrating that community-based collectives are indispensable for delivering and sustaining both water and sanitation services.

These interventions, supported through convergence with SBM-G and IM and state rural livelihood missions and PHED departments, build ownership and offer replicable models for scale.

Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSCs)

The guidelines of both SBM-G/IM mandate that at least 50% of VWSC members must be women and have representation from the Panchayat and members of SC/ST. As of April 2024, data indicates that over 3.2 lakh women serve in key roles (president, secretary, treasurer) in VWSCs across India. In states like Odisha and Meghalaya, women-led VWSCs have been linked with:

- Higher community contributions to water user charges.
- Greater adherence to water safety and hygiene protocols.
- Timely complaint resolution on water supply issues.

For example, in the Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh, the Mao Naranda Jal Samiti, entirely managed by tribal women, oversees the operation of a single-village scheme, maintaining the distribution line, chlorination, and water quality records.

Swachhagrahis and Community Resource Persons

In SBM-G Phase I, over 5.5 lakh swachhagrahis were actively engaged and in SBM-G Phase-II, the program has engaged with 3.6 lakh swachhagrahis. Many of them are women, trained in participatory techniques such as community-led total sanitation (CLTS), interpersonal communication (IPC), and menstrual hygiene management (MHM).

Aligned with this initiative, under the rural sanitation WOT, in Uttar Pradesh, young change makers are leading MHM clubs in schools, leading school-based sessions on handwashing and safe disposal of sanitary

Hydrating India, Harvesting Prosperity

The Jai Shakti Abhiyan
has empowered more than **50,000** villages to become water-savvy, transforming rural communities and enhancing livelihoods.

DID YOU KNOW?

JAI SHAKTI ABHIYAN
Government of India

Case Study – Dumka, Jharkhand



In a remote village, Subarnada Block, Panchayat Sonaul Jore, a hamlet of 172 people across 18 households, all belonging to a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, Bujeri from before the face of transformation. Confronted by water scarcity that undermined health, school attendance and livelihoods, she mobilised her community and engaged local authorities until Sonaul was selected for a piped water scheme under the Jal Jeevan Mission. Today, 100% of households have tap connections (information uploaded on the JJM Portal), water-borne diseases have fallen sharply, and women and girls are freed from the daily burden of fetching water. To ensure sustainability and local ownership, the village now selects a full-time household for ongoing operation and maintenance.

women. Their credibility in the community makes them effective in addressing taboo subjects such as menstruation or pit emptying, which male facilitators may struggle with.

Water Revolution Led by Women

We are living in a time of unprecedented opportunity. For the first time in history we have the systems, the technology, and the collective will to ensure every household in rural India receives clean drinking water. JJM has made this possibility more real than ever, crossing the wilderness of 15 more tap connections. But behind this data point lies a story of resilience, ingenuity, and, above all, leadership by rural women.

Today, more than 24.90 lakh women have been trained for testing water samples using the Field Testing Kit (FTK). Across India's villages, women have emerged as frontline managers of rural water supply systems, embracing shifts like planning, etc. No longer limited to traditional roles, women are now at the helm of ensuring that every household receives clean, safe tap water. Marking a deep shift towards women-led development, Jal Jeevan Mission has been instrumental in nurturing accountable, village-level leadership among women, instilling the confidence to take charge of a lifeline service. In doing so, it has redefined both governance and gender roles, proving that when women lead, communities thrive.

Linking WWS to Broader Rural Development

The empowerment of women in WWS is not an isolated outcome. It supports multiple goals of rural development across various SDGs.

- **SDG 3 – Health:** Reduction in water-borne diseases, improved menstrual hygiene, and reduced child mortality.
- **SDG 4 – Education:** Availability of toilets has improved girls' retention in schools (Annual Status of Education Report, ASER 2021).
- **SDG 5 – Gender Equality:** SBM-G and JJM have increased women's participation and involvement in decision-making. Earlier, they had little say, but now they are part of meetings, testing water, managing water supply and keeping their villages clean. These changes have given them more respect, improved their daily lives, and opened up new opportunities for work and education.
- **SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation:** JJM and SBM-G are helping villages get clean water and safe toilets. But more importantly, they are making sure these services last. People in the village are trained and encouraged to take care of their own water and sanitation systems.
- **SDG 8 – Livelihoods:** Operation of sanitation enterprises, water delivery management, and WWS monitoring are creating income streams.

While women's participation is rising, a few systemic challenges persist, one of which includes transforming governance roles of Panchayats and Jal Sahay/Jal Sakhi. The way forward needs to move from Participation to Power that will make WWS an engine for women-led development. A few strategic actions must be prioritized:

- **Institutional Leadership:** Make women-led WWSs and SHCs core components of SBM and JJM



Women empowered to conduct water quality test

a part of their programme KPIs (Key Performance Indicators).

- **Invest in Capacity:** Build sustained, modular training programmes for women on WASH planning, financial management and grievance handling delivered through platforms like ERM Academy, ERM Digital Academy, ERM Nivesa Training Centre, and e-learning modules.
- **Promote Women-Owned Sanitation Enterprises:** Enable access to capital and technical know-how to run FSTPs, MFM product units, or greywater treatment systems.
- **Data and Storytelling:** Track and publicise data on women's roles in WASH governance. Honour top-performing women-led Gram Panchayats during events like Swachh Bharat Diwas and Women's Day.
- **Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNCs),** formed under the National Health Mission, serve as vital community platforms that can be leveraged for rural WASH by aligning them with VWSCs, building their capacity for sanitation planning and monitoring and promoting convergence with health and nutrition interventions to ensure holistic village-level outcomes.
- **Convergence with National Rural Livelihood Mission, Ministry of Women & Child Development, and Ministry of Panchayats (aj):** Formative collaboration frameworks to embed WASH goals into women's SHGs, Anganwadis nurseries, and Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs).

As we look ahead, it is essential to continue working towards building a *jan Bhagidari*, the idea that development is most sustainable when people shape and drive it themselves. Women-led action in WASH is a living example of this principle, showing how shared responsibility and grassroots participation can turn infrastructure into impact.

In the next phase of India's rural development journey, WASH is not just a set of services but a platform for empowerment and equality. When women lead on water and sanitation, they bring not only better results but lasting change. The mission ahead for rural WASH is about building systems that enable women to lead, manage, and sustain these assets. A nation where every woman is a water warrior, a sanitation entrepreneur, and a hygiene champion is a nation where development is both inclusive and enduring. □



Making Water Sources Sustainable

India's water story is being rewritten — not in government files, but in the daily lives of its people. From the tap that changed everything to rivers that will flow again, this is a movement driven by ASHA workers building soak pits with their own hands, by school children conducting water audits, by sarpanches mobilizing entire villages to clean a pond, and by mothers who now insist on testing drinking water before use.

Water is the first element offered to a guest and the last poured during a funeral. It courtesies our fields, runs through our rituals, and sustains our dreams. Yet, over the past few decades, this elemental force, so vital and so vulnerable, has come under unprecedented stress. Erratic rainfall patterns, rising temperatures, unchecked over-extraction, pollution, and growing demands from a booming population have put our

water sources under strain. For a nation that holds just 4% of the world's freshwater and sustains nearly 18% of its people, this is not merely a crisis. It's a call to action.

And India is responding. Through bold policy decisions, people-led movements, technology-led interventions, and deep partnerships, we are rewriting our water story—one drop, one village, and one river at a time.



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As the Union Minister of State in the Ministry of Jal Shakti, I have had the honour to witness this transformation first-hand. The last few years have marked a profound shift in how India approaches water: from extraction to conservation, from dependency to decentralisation, from scarcity to sustainability.

Let me take you through this unfolding journey.

The Tap that Changed Everything

Not long ago, women and girls would walk for hours each day balancing heavy pots on their heads, to collect water from distant wells or ponds, water that was often unsafe. The cost of this burden was invisible but immense: girls missing school, women suffering from chronic pain, families exposed to water-borne diseases, and a crushing loss of time and dignity. This is the reality that the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) set out to change.

Launched in 2019 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Mission's vision was simple yet radical: to provide functional household tap connections (FHTCs) to every rural household. Today, we are proud to say that over 15.67 crore rural households have access to tap water—an achievement that is historic not just in scale but in spirit. Because JJM is not merely about laying pipes. It is about empowering communities to own and sustain their water sources. Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSCs), with women in leadership roles, are now managing local water supply systems, testing water quality using field kits, and drafting village water security plans. In many villages, women—once water-bearers—are now water managers. This transformation is not technical; it is personal. With water in tap, girls stay in school. Mothers cook meals on time. Farmers irrigate efficiently. And an entire generation begins to dream bigger.

Reshaping the Future

India's rainfall is generous but fleeting. Most of our precipitation arrives during a short monsoon window, often in intense bursts, and quickly drains away without being harnessed. Our ancestors knew the value of every drop; they built stepwells, tanks, and ponds to capture it. Over time, however, many of these traditional systems fell into neglect.

The 'Catch the Rain' campaign is one attempt to revive that ancestral wisdom and pair it with modern science. Launched as a *Jeevan Shakti* with the powerful *miti* to *sochne*—'Catch the rain, where it falls, what it falls'—this initiative has gained wide acceptance to



Prime Minister Narendra Modi tips the rainwater can, for the first time, rain being captured in rooftop, rooftop project.

into water conservation into their own hands. The crux of this campaign is building a large-scale awareness campaign so that conservation of water becomes a *Jeevan Shakti*.

Jal Shakti Aahvan - Catch the Rain (JSA-CTR) campaign has five focused interventions—(1) rainwater harvesting & water conservation, (2) enamelling, geo-tagging & making inventory of all water bodies, preparation of scientific plans for water conservation, (3) setting up Jal Shakti Kendra in all districts, (4) creative demonstration and (5) awareness generation.

Across States/UT and districts

- Rooftop rainwater harvesting systems are being installed in schools, government buildings, health centres, and even railway stations.
- Over 25 lakh *Anch* *Saravali* (community ponds and water bodies) have been created or rejuvenated, becoming centres of ecological and social renewal.
- Tools like remote sensing, GIS mapping, and real-time digital dashboards help monitor progress and ensure transparency.

This is not just about water conservation. It is a reformation of our relationship with nature. Villages once plagued by water scarcity are now becoming water positive, and communities that once waited for the monsoon are now ready to harvest it.

The Jal Shakti Jeevan Bhagat (JSB) initiative, launched under JSA-CTR, reflects the Prime Minister's resolve to make water conservation a national priority. It aims at promoting community participation in building artificial recharge structures and borewell recharge shafts to enhance water storage and boost groundwater levels. Backed by the convergence of multiple schemes and transparent monitoring, JSB

is winning citizens, institutions, and governments to a shared mission for a water-secure future.

Managing Wastewater

In rural India, the concept of wastewater, particularly greywater from kitchens and bathrooms, was, until recently, an afterthought. But in a water-scarce country, every drop matters. That's where Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) (SBM-G) Phase II comes into play.

While the first phase of SBM-G successfully made India open defecation free (ODF), the second phase of the ODF Plus Model goes beyond toilets. It focuses on solid and liquid waste management, especially the reuse of greywater and wastewater management, to ensure a truly clean and sustainable village ecosystem.

Central to this effort lie the 3 R's - Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, a simple yet powerful framework guiding villages to cut down waste, repurpose water for gardens and recharge, and treat what remains in environmentally sound ways. The result is a shift in mindset: wastewater is no longer seen as waste but as a resource that can enrich soil, support livelihoods, and make villages cleaner, greener, and more self-reliant.

Today, across thousands of Gram Panchayats:

- Greywater is being channelled to kitchen gardens, improving household nutrition.
- Groundwater recharge is being enabled through low-cost soak pits, leach pits, and wetlands.

Efforts are also underway to treat and repurpose industrial wastewater, turning a potential pollutant into a productive resource. Treated industrial effluents, once safely processed, are being channelled for

agricultural use, helping reduce pressure on freshwater sources. This not only supports circular water use but also encourages industries to adopt responsible and sustainable waste management practices, aligned with local water needs and environmental safeguards.

Innovative technologies such as bio-sanitation units in Tamil Nadu, DEWATS (Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems) in Maharashtra, and seewerfiltration in Odisha are being adopted based on local geography and community needs. However, perhaps the most important innovation is social. Where once wastewater was seen as dirt, it is now seen as a resource which is managed by communities and transformed into something of value.

Rainwater remains our most vital natural resource. Its scientific conservation and usage are essential for effective groundwater recharge and to strengthen institutions like the Charjati.

Automated Rain Gauges (ARGs) are modern instruments that can accurately measure rainfall and transmit real-time data to digital platforms. It will empower local governance institutions, such as Panchayats, to make informed decisions for water conservation, recharge planning, and distribution. This data can serve as a foundation for planning—where to build soak pits, how to design check dams, and how much water to store for the dry months ahead. It will also help in water budgeting—estimating how much water is available for drinking, agriculture, and daily use, allowing villages to manage resources wisely and avoid shortages.

With real-time updates available on the Meri Panchayat App and IWM dashboard, villagers will not have to rely on guesswork. From planning water use to preparing for floods or dry spells, this small instrument will unlock big changes, ushering in a new era of trust, transparency, and self-reliance in rural water governance.

What Lies Beneath: Groundwater

India's agricultural miracle has been powered by what lies beneath. Groundwater accounts for more than 60% of irrigation and nearly 85% of rural drinking water. But decades of over-extraction, combined with the loss of recharge zones, have pushed many aquifers to the brink.



www.charjati.in/charjati.org/charjati.org/

To address this, the Ministry launched the Atal Bhujal Yojana (Atal Jal), which is a community-led, data-driven groundwater management programme supported by the World Bank. Covering over 8,000 Gram Panchayats across seven water-stressed States/UTs, the programme empowers local communities to monitor budget and conserve groundwater.

Villages are mapping aquifers, creating 'Water Security Plans', and aligning cropping patterns with water availability. Farmers are being trained to shift from water-intensive crops to sustainable alternatives. Real-time IoT-based groundwater sensors, mobile apps for budgeting, and AI-driven dashboards are putting data into the hands of villages.

This programme is not just preserving aquifers; it is transforming rural governance. Communities that once fought over water are now planning together for its future.

The Rivers will Flow Again

From the Indus to the Ganga, from the Brahmaputra to the Godavari, rivers are the veins through which India breathes. But rapid urbanisation, industrial effluents, and mining, and unregulated encroachments have left many of our rivers choking.

Under the National Ganga Programme, we have shown what is possible when political will, scientific expertise, and public participation come together. Over the past five years:

- Over 157 sewage treatment plants (STPs) have been completed or are under construction.
- Industrial effluents are now tracked through online monitoring systems.
- Riverfronts and ghats have been cleaned and rejuvenated across 100 rivers.

But our commitment does not stop with the Ganga. Inspired by its success, we are supporting the rejuvenation of smaller rivers, tributaries, and streams across States like Madhya Pradesh, Haryana Pradesh, and Odisha.

Whether it's desilting seasonal silted, restoring village ponds, or planting native trees along riverbanks, these efforts are helping ecosystems recover and communities reconnect with their rivers. Because when rivers flow, culture flourishes, and futures are secured.

Partnerships that Drive Change

No mission of this magnitude can be achieved by

the government alone. At every step, we have relied on the power of collaboration.

- Self-Help Groups (SHGs) across India are building soak pits, maintaining toilets, producing awareness materials, and leading behavioural change campaigns.
- Startups and entrepreneurs are introducing innovative, affordable technologies for water filtration, quality testing, and smart monitoring.
- CSR initiatives by companies are supporting rainwater harvesting, school WASH programmes, and IRC campaigns.
- International development partners such as UNICEF, World Bank, and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation bring technical expertise, research, and global best practices.

Together, we are building not just infrastructure, but ecosystems of accountability and innovation.

A Tapestry Woven by All

What makes this journey extraordinary is not just the scale but the soul behind it. This is a movement driven by Aajda workers building soak pits with their own hands. By school children conducting water audits. By sarpanches mobilising entire villages to clean a pond. By mothers who now insist on testing drinking water before use. By farmers who adopt less water-intensive cropping not because they're told, but because they understand.

India's water story is being rewritten—not in the government files, but in the daily lives of its people.

The Road Ahead

We still have a long way to go. Climate change will continue to challenge our progress. Population growth will increase pressure on our resources. But we are more prepared than ever, backed by robust policies, powerful data systems, strong community institutions, and a vision that is both ambitious and inclusive.

Our dream is a 'Jai Shreebharti Bharat', where every home has access to safe water, where every river is alive, where every village is resilient, and where water is seen not as a commodity but as a common good. We owe this to our children. We owe it to our future. And we owe it to the sacred relationship that civilisation has always had with water.

Let us make every drop count. Let us make India water secure. □



A Decade of WASH

“आमोदिआपकेपुनःआवृत्तकीआशाएँ नयेकदमदूरकी
 ओर.दिल्लीकेआमोदकेआमोदके। आशीर्वाद।”

Water is the source of happiness, energy, health and purity, and is life giving as a mother.

“सौभाग्यवशआपकेआमोद, सौभाग्यवश, सौभाग्यवशआमोद, सौभाग्यवश,
 आपने मुझे, सौभाग्यवशकी, सौभाग्यवशकीआमोद, सौभाग्यवश”

Cleanliness is a mark of respect for health, the root of well-being, the essence of complete wellness, the breath of life, the purity of the self, the foundation of societal stability, a catalyst for prosperous development, and the root of righteousness.

In the archives of India's developmental journey, the past decade stands out for a silent yet powerful revolution, one that has changed the face of rural India by restoring dignity, ease of living, health, and hope. This revolution is encapsulated in the twin flagship missions of Government of India: *Saarthi Shakti Mission Gramin (SBM-G)* and *Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)*. Together, these missions have redefined the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) landscape by embedding technology in governance and placing rural communities and *Gram Panchayats* at the heart of planning and execution. WASH initiatives have been pivotal in transforming the landscape of life standards, economy, social inclusivity and public health in India.

Over the past decade, the country has witnessed significant strides in improving access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and hygiene practices. In the past few years, the grassroots democracy has harmoniously intertwined with innovation and technology to usher in a new era of sustainable and inclusive development.

India has long grappled with issues related to water scarcity, inadequate sanitation facilities, and poor hygiene practices. The need for robust WASH initiatives became increasingly evident as these issues contributed

to high rates of waterborne diseases, malnutrition, and mortality. The government's commitment to addressing these challenges led to the launch of several ambitious programmes aimed at improving WASH infrastructure and practices across the country.

However, India's engagement with water and sanitation is not new. The Indus Valley Civilisation (c. 2500 BCE) showcased some of the earliest examples of advanced urban planning, complete with covered drainage systems and household toilets. However, over time, particularly during colonial rule and post-independence, sanitation slipped from being a public priority. This historical neglect was compounded by caste-based rites and social hierarchies that stigmatised sanitation, leading to entrenched habits like open defecation in rural areas.

After independence, India began incorporating health, water and sanitation into its national planning efforts. In 1951, the first Five Year Plan was launched and since then, in some way or the other, health and sanitation found mention in almost every plan. The Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP) was launched in 1986 as the first nationwide, centrally sponsored initiative focused exclusively on sanitation.

Its goals were to improve rural living conditions and promote dignity to women through toilet access. CRSP was largely supply-driven, and due to limited community involvement, the results were modest in raising sanitation coverage.

In 1999, India introduced the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) with a shift in approach, moving from infrastructure to awareness and demand generation. It focused on Information, Education and Communication (IEC) strategies, capacity building, and involvement of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs). While TSC made headway in building toilets and promoting sanitation as a felt need, its implementation varied across states, and the health impacts remained limited.

Building on TSC, the *Writhe! Planee! Abhiyan* (FBA) was launched in 2009 to provide subsidies for toilet construction for Below Poverty Line (BPL) families and promote community-led total sanitation. It brought sanitation to the forefront of public policy and enabled states to frame sanitation specific policies. In 2014, TSC was restructured to *Swachh Bharat Mission* in response to the urgent need for comprehensive sanitation coverage.

India's quest with rural water supply is not new. The foundation of this effort dates to the first Five-Year Plan (1951-54), where the Environmental Hygiene Committee's recommendations led to the inception of the National Water Supply Programme in 1954. The rural water supply was integrated into the Community Development Programme and was supported by the Ministry of Health through the National Water Supply and Sanitation Programme until the Third Five-Year Plan (1961-66). A major shift occurred with the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) in 1972-75, designed to address acute water scarcity and waterborne diseases. This initiative gained momentum under the Minimum Needs Programme during the Fifth Five-Year Plan (1974-79).

The National Drinking Water Mission (NDWM), also known as the Technology Mission, launched in 1986, introduced scientific research and cost-effective technologies to address water scarcity challenges. The Eighth Five-Year Plan (1992-97) expanded the focus to address water quality issues, particularly contamination from arsenic, fluoride, iron, and salinity. The late 1990s marked a shift toward decentralised, demand-driven, and community-engaged sector reforms, with Gram Panchayats and local committees taking on active roles in planning, implementing, and

managing drinking water schemes. This approach was scaled up under the *Swachh Bharat* programme in 2012. In the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-12), ARWSP was integrated into the *Shakti* Women project, striving for full habitation coverage by 2010-10. The programme was later restructured into the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) in 2009-10, emphasising sustainable water availability.

Further refinements were introduced in 2012 and 2019, with an increased focus on piped water supply service levels, water quality, and maintenance of existing schemes. The National Water Quality Sub-Mission (NWQSM), launched in February 2017, aimed to provide safe drinking water to habitations affected by arsenic and fluoride contamination by March 2021.

Despite these efforts, full access to safe sanitation and water supply progress remained fragmented and infrastructure-driven, with insufficient emphasis on behaviour change, community engagement, and long-term sustainability.

Turning Point

It was in 2014, the Prime Minister of India gave a strategic call to make India Open Defection Free (ODF). *Swachh Bharat Mission* has since taken a revolution which mobilised a force of over a billion people, making it the world's largest sanitation drive that led to the construction of over 10 crore individual household toilets in rural India over a five-year period, taking sanitation coverage from 39% in 2014 to 100% in 2019. Having achieved 100% status, SAM-4 Phase II was launched with the objective of achieving *Samachar* Swachh, i.e. sustaining the ODF status and managing solid and liquid waste by transforming all the villages from ODF to ODF Plus Model.



A woman in the Survedi block village with the words 'स्वच्छ भारत' (Swachh Bharat)

Impact of SBM

Lives saved

- 3 lakh diarrhoeal deaths avoided in 2019 compared to 2014 - WHO 2018

Improved nutrition and productivity

- 58% higher cases of wasting among children in non-ODF areas - BMGF 2017

Safety and dignity of women

- 93% women feel safer after getting a toilet at home - UNICEF 2017

Better economics

- Rs 50,000 saved every year on average by a household in an ODF village due to health costs avoided - UNICEF 2017

Protects environment

- 2.70 times less likelihood of groundwater contamination traceable to humans in ODF villages - UNICEF 2019

Child health

- 60,000-70,000 child deaths averted annually - Nature magazine 2024

In 2019, the Union Government approved the rebranding and subsuming of HRDF into Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) - 'Har Ghar Jal' aiming to provide functional Household Tap Connections (HTCs) to every rural household. On 15 August 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched Jal Jeevan Mission in his Independence Day speech from the rampart of Red Fort.

Jal Jeevan Mission is a paradigm shift, a revolution to ensure access to safe drinking water. The mission envisioned that every rural household has drinking water supply in adequate quantity (at least 55 lpcd), of prescribed quality (BSI 10534 standard), on a regular and long-term basis at affordable service delivery charges leading to improvement in living standards of rural communities.

These two missions have not merely addressed infrastructure gaps but have transformed the WASH sector into a people-centric participatory movement backed by robust policy frameworks, political willing, funding, technological convergence and capacity-building mechanisms.

Community Led Transformation

A distinctive feature of both SBM-G and JJM is the centrality of Gram Panchayats (GPs) and community in driving change. As constitutionally empowered

institutions under the 73rd Amendment, Panchayats have been entrusted with the planning, execution, and monitoring of village-level WASH interventions.

Under JJM, every village prepares a Village Action Plan (VAP) encompassing drinking water sources, supply infrastructure, greywater management, and water quality monitoring. These plans are developed and implemented by Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSCs)/Pani Samitis, subcommittees of GPs with at least 50% women members and representation from marginalised class. Till date in 5.85 lakh villages over 5.2 lakh VWSCs had formed and VAPs prepared with community involvement.

Similarly, in SBM-G Phase II, GPs are leading the efforts to sustain Open Defecation Free (ODF) status by implementing Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) systems, non-potable toilets, and fostering behaviour change. More than 4.61 lakh villages have achieved ODF Plus Model status, with GPs playing an instrumental role in resource mobilisation, awareness generation, and convergence.

Technology & Innovation

India's WASH journey has been bolstered by strategic technological interventions that have made service delivery more reliable, cost-effective, and inclusive.



Women are proud of testing water quality using Field Test Kits (FTK)

- **Twins PH Toilet Technology:** STM-G popularised the use of twin pit toilets, which are affordable, easy to maintain, and environmentally safe. The composted waste becomes a rich source of manure, completing the cycle of ecological sanitation.
 - **Under STM-G Phase II,** plastic waste management has been strengthened through the establishment of Plastic Waste Management Units at block levels with provisions for shredding and recycling. Women's SHGs have been actively engaged in waste collection, segregation, and awareness activities. These efforts have improved rural sanitation outcomes while promoting environmental sustainability.
 - **Insulated Water Pipes in Ladakh:** In cold desert regions like Ladakh, where sub-zero temperatures often burst pipelines, insulated water pipes have been introduced, ensuring year-round access to piped water—a technological marvel adapted to extreme climates.
 - **Solar-Powered Water Supply Systems:** In alignment with India's renewable energy goals, several states have implemented solar-powered in-village water supply schemes reducing dependency of grid electricity.
 - **Floating Water Supply Schemes:** In regions with challenging terrain or limited land availability, Gujarat has introduced floating water supply systems, an innovation that ensures resilience during monsoon flooding and provides flexibility in deployment.
 - **Internet of Things (IoT) & Real-Time Monitoring:** IIM has adopted IoT technologies to enable real-time monitoring of water supply flow meters, chlorine analysers, and pressure sensors transmit live data to dashboards used for preventive maintenance, quality assurance, and grievance redressal.
- Safe water is a non-negotiable right. Ensuring the chemical and microbial purity of drinking water has been a core pillar of IIM. India has developed an extensive water testing network comprising 2,187 laboratories. These laboratories are testing water samples on a regular basis and Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) is taking operative measures to ensure quality potable water supply. These water testing laboratories are now open for common public to check their water quality bearing minimal testing cost.
- Mobile water testing vans in Haridwar, up to people intervention, bring services to the remotest corners.

The Water Quality Management Information System (WQMS) enables citizens to view test results online and lodge grievances.

Citizen-centric governance is incomplete without effective grievance redressal systems. SBM-G and JIM have adopted several tools to improve accountability and transparency. States like Odisha, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu have integrated call centres, helplines, and mobile apps to address complaints related to water supply or sanitation. Social audits, for example, and Wall Paintings in villages serve as information and monitoring tools. Digital dashboards such as the SBM and JIM MIS (Integrated Management Information System) provide real-time progress tracking at village level.

Uttar's innovative Toilet Clinic Initiative launched under SBM-G with UNICEF's support, functions as a one-stop solution centre at the block level, offering affordable services for toilet retrofitting, maintenance, and cleaning. These clinics provide standardised materials, trained masons, and sanitation workers, ensuring quality and accountability in sanitation services. By engaging women as Self-Help Groups (SHGs), the initiative not only enhances sanitation infrastructure but also promotes women's empowerment and community participation.

Behaviour Change & Citizen Engagement

Infrastructure alone cannot bring lasting change without sustained Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) efforts. Both missions have



Community members participate in a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) activity, mapping their village to identify water and sanitation priorities together.

employed robust Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) strategies through mass media, SII media, wall art, radioed messages, and school-based programs.

DDWS's *Garwara Band*, *Saachhagrahi* movement, *Comkey Se Nisid Aharat*, *Jal Yam*, *Saachh Sujal Gera*, *Azaadi Ki 75 Akhbariyas*, *PM Samvad*, *Saachh Sujal Shakti*, *Saamra*, are few names of its mass campaigns that has created mass awareness and community involvement. These special IEC campaigns have focused on women's leadership, menstrual hygiene, school WASH, and climate resilience.



Women from the community come together in a training session on water management and sanitation.

Women, being the primary custodians of water and disproportionately affected by inadequate WASH facilities are prioritised in these initiatives. In villages, SHG members are trained to test water quality using Field Test Kits (FTK). Haryana's over 240 lakh women have been empowered with this skill so far and they are regularly testing the quality of water at source and delivery points.

Women groups like *Jal Sakhi* in Punjab, *Khudshikhand*, *Jal Sakhi* of Madhya Pradesh, *Jal Sakshis* of Jharkhand are pioneering



Empowered and online—A village woman consults before a digital display tracking water supply data.

water conservation efforts, fixing leakages, collecting user charges, working as plumbers, pump operators etc. Women are trained in Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) methodology and joined as Swachh gretis to trigger the behaviour of community towards safe sanitation.

True to the spirit of Am Azadi, the WASH movement has seen active participation from women, self-help groups, schoolchildren, retired defence personnel, and community-based organisations. In many villages, women SHGs have taken charge of groundwater reuse and toilet maintenance. Communities have transitioned to solar-powered, self-managed water systems. Women have emerged themselves as WASH agents, realising their rightful place in decision-making and public life.

WASH outcomes have been strengthened by converging with allied schemes and departments:

- MGNREGS has been used to create soak pits, community toilets, and water recharge structures.
- National Health Mission (NHM) supports WASH in health centres and manages waterborne diseases.
- Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan has improved WASH facilities in schools.

The integration of SBM and JJM in planning at the GP level has enabled better resource utilisation and local innovation. Importantly, WASH is now integral to the aspirational districts program, SDG localisation efforts, and climate change adaptation plans.

The Road Ahead

As India progresses toward a Viksit Bharat 2047, the next phase of WASH will focus on:

- Sustaining ODF Plus Model status through institutionalised SUWM systems, with a dedicated focus on enabling the creation of Swachh Sujal Grams—villages that are both ODF Plus Model verified under Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) and Har Ghar Jal certified under Jal Jeevan Mission, symbolising convergence of safe sanitation and assured water supply at the grassroots.
- Universal and equitable access to safe water for all, especially marginalised communities and aspirational blocks.
- Digital transformation, with Smart Mobile phones, IoT, AI, and GIS tools integrated into asset tracking, water budgeting, and climate-smart infrastructure.
- Capacity building at scale, including certified training for rural engineers, Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC), and barefoot technicians.
- Strengthening GPs and its sub-committees as public utilities.
- Strengthening inter-departmental collaboration and Panchayat capacities to become effective local service providers.

In just ten years, India has moved from sanitation deprivation to sanitation dignity, from water scarcity to water security, and from top-down implementation to community-driven development.

The journey of SBM and JJM is not merely about numbers. It is about restoring dignity to rural women, preventing disease, creating livelihoods, and making governance participatory. It is about how a democracy, through its Panchayats and its people, empowered by technology, can truly transform the everyday lives of its citizens. The WASH revolution is evidence to what India can achieve when policy, people, and progress converge with purpose. As we enter the Amrit Mahi, the mission continues with renewed vigour, inclusive intent, and a shared commitment to leaving no one behind. □



WASH in Schools and Anganwadis

Behavioural change is central to achieving lasting WASH outcomes. States and UTs have been advised to prioritise the universal availability of separate toilets for girls, clean and safe drinking water through tap connections, and continuous running water in toilets.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) in schools and Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) is a cornerstone for safeguarding children's health, dignity and right to quality education. Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)—the Government of India has prioritised universal access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, and hygiene education in educational institutions. The Department of School Education & Literacy (DSSEL), in collaboration with the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS), Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), and various State/UT governments, continues to spearhead this transformative agenda.



Children practicing hand washing with soap at school – an essential life skill for Health and Hygiene.

Swachhata Action Plan

The Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, is implementing the Swachh Shiksha Scheme from 2018-19, which has now been aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to support States and UTs in strengthening existing government schools. The need for infrastructure augmentation in schools is worked out in a decentralized manner every year by the respective State/Union Territory and reflected in their Annual Work Plan & Budget (AWP&B). These plans are appraised and approved by the Project Appraisal Board (PAB) in consultation with the States and Union Territories in accordance with the nature and availability of resources.

Under the Swachh Shiksha Scheme, there is a provision of a separate Budget Head for the release of funds under the Swachhata Action Plan (SAP). The scheme provides for an annual recurring composite school grant varying upto Rs 1,00,000/- per annum depending upon the number of students for all government schools, out of which at least 10% is to be spent on activities related to the Swachhata Action Plan (SAP) for maintenance of school facilities including toilets, safe drinking water, sanitation & hygiene (WASH), etc.

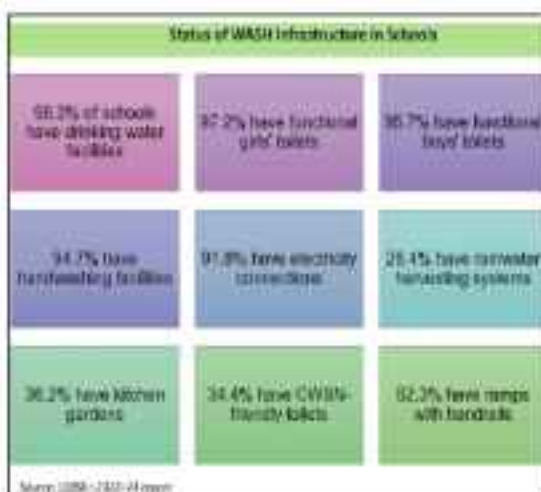
Behavioural Change and Community Engagement

Behavioural change is central to achieving lasting WASH outcomes. Through initiatives like Swachh Vidyalaya, Swachhata Action Plan funding, and

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Yearly campaigns like the Swachh Kothwade and Javahars in July and other regular campaigns in schools of all the States/UTs and students are taught critical practices such as handwashing with soap, toilet use, and menstrual hygiene, etc.

1. Swachh Kothwade 2024: In coordination with all the States/UTs, the flagship campaign of Swachh Kothwade 2024 was observed from 01 to 15 September 2024. As per the report furnished by States/UTs, more than 7.96 lakh schools and 7.48 crore students participated in Swachh Kothwade activities across the country.
2. 2 October is observed as Swachh Bharat Diwas (SBD) to celebrate Jai Shri Mata for Swachhata, which is a tribute to the Mahatma on the day of his Jayanti. As a prelude, this Department, in coordination with the Ministry of Housing &



Urban Affairs (MinUA) and the Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation (DDWS), organized 'Swachh Kothwade M. Emd' (SKE) campaigns from 17 September 2024 to 2 October 2024. The theme of SKE-2024 was 'Swachh Swachhata - Samiksha Swachhata'. More than 35-50 thousand events had been created by all the above autonomous bodies and States/UTs on the SKE portal of MoUUA. In these events, more than 2.59 lakh schools and 2.89 crore students took Shiksha on 'Swachh Swachhata - Samiksha Swachhata' across the country.

The above initiatives are intended for Behavioural Change and Community Engagement through mass handwashing demonstrations, Clean school campaigns and competitions, Awareness rallies and poster-making contests, etc. School Management Committees (SMCs) and Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNCs) are mobilised to ensure active community participation and ownership.

Gender and Inclusive WASH Infrastructure

WASH facilities must be gender-sensitive and inclusive. The provision of separate toilets for girls, the availability of sanitary products, and safe disposal mechanisms are essential to



reducing absenteeism among adolescent girls. Schools are also mandated to be accessible for children with disabilities (CWSN), with ramps, handrails and adapted toilets being implemented across states.

Source Sustainability and Climate Resilience

The Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and AMRUT 2.0 emphasise source sustainability through rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, and greywater reuse. Schools are being equipped with rain pit, rooftop rainwater systems, and kitchen gardens, linking environmental education with sustainability. Various joint letters have been issued to States/UTs in this regard to exhort the States to achieve the objectives of JJM and AMRUT 2.0.

Technological and Institutional Innovation

Digital dashboards, mobile-based monitoring apps, and geo-tagged school facilities under *Samagra Shiksha* and UDISE+ allow for real-time tracking of infrastructure and usage. Through the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+), this Department captures data with regard to WASH. Further, real-time monitoring is being done by this Department through the PRASANNHI (Project Approval, Budgeting, Achievements and Data Handling System) portal.

Institutional Coordination and Government Convergence

A whole-of-government approach is being contributed to effect:

- Facilitate drinking water and tap connections in schools.
- Enhance greywater management and rainwater harvesting.
- Hold quarterly reviews at the Chief Secretary level and monthly at the Education Secretary level.
- Share progress with DoS&L, enabling national coordination.

These efforts underscore the role of convergence across departments and levels of government.

Way Forward

To accelerate progress towards universal and sustainable WASH in schools and AMAs, this department has adopted a saturation approach to ensure the provision of safe water, essential hygiene, and sanitation facilities in all schools, in alignment with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. States and UTs have been advised to prioritise the universal availability of separate toilets for girls, clean

and safe drinking water through tap connections, and curbs on running water in toilets. Furthermore, all stakeholders have been urged to ensure the implementation of rainwater harvesting systems and sustained access to potable water in schools to promote a safe and healthy learning environment for all students.

WASH in schools and Anganwadis is more than a matter of infrastructure—it is an enabler of educational attainment, gender equality, child health, and social equity. The Department of School Education & Literacy, in close coordination with the Departments of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Women and Child Development, Health and Family Welfare, and all States and Union Territories, is leading this convergence agenda with purpose and resolve. □





Empowering Women & Nurturing Children

Hygiene education in Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) supports healthy habits from a young age. Provision of nearby water sources frees up time for education, skill development, and income generation.

Access to clean water, adequate sanitation, and better hygiene practices, collectively known as WASH, are fundamental human rights. It is a foundational element to achieving gender equality and fostering child development across the world.

In many parts of the world, including India, the burden of sanitation management falls disproportionately on women and girls. This unpaid labor often takes up several hours each day, limiting their ability to attend school, participate in economic activities, or engage with the community. The absence of safe and accessible sanitation facilities also exposes women and girls to significant health and safety risks, including violence and harassment while accessing poorly located toilets.

In India, where socio-economic differences and traditional gender roles often impede progress, efforts to address WASH-related challenges have seen renewed momentum in recent years through initiatives like the Jal Jeeva Mission (JJM), Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), etc., that helped every possible stakeholder to contribute to adopting better WASH practices for the larger welfare of societies.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) has recognised this intersection and has taken deliberate steps to embed WASH into its mission/objectives to empower women and nurture children. The initiatives of MoWCD underscore the pivotal role of WASH in not just preventing disease but also in breaking the cycle of malnutrition and gender

disparity. This article explores the deep connection between WASH, gender equality, and child well-being, while highlighting the impact of key government schemes under the MoWCD.

Gender Equality

Women and girls disproportionately bear the burden of inadequate WASH services. They often spend hours collecting water, face challenges related to menstrual hygiene, and are exposed to safety risks due to a lack of safe sanitation facilities. Some of the key gender challenges addressed by WASH are:

- **Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM):** Lack of safe and private facilities affects girls' school attendance and dignity.
- **Safety and Dignity:** Access to toilets reduces exposure to harassment.
- **Time Burden:** Provision of nearby water sources frees up time for education, skill development, and income generation.
- **Empowerment:** Women's participation in community WASH committees strengthens decision-making roles.

Child Well-being

Clean water and sanitation are essential for child survival, growth, and development. Poor WASH contributes to diarrhoeal diseases, malnutrition, and school absenteeism. Some of the key Child Benefits from WASH are:

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- Improved Health: Reduction in waterborne diseases like diarrhoea, dysentery, and typhoid.
- Better Nutrition: Clean environments reduce infections, improving nutrient absorption.
- Regular Attendance: Functional toilets, especially for girls, increase enrolment and retention.
- Early Childhood Development: Hygiene education in Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) supports healthy habits from a young age.

Initiatives to Integrate WASH

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has embedded WASH components into various flagship programmes to achieve gender and child development goals.

1. **Mission Shiksha Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0** (Mission Poshan 2.0) are two of the MoWCD's flagship initiatives. It has subsumed *Poshan Abhiyan*, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) (14-18 years in NE States and Aspirational Districts) and is instrumental in taking up WASH for not only the target beneficiaries but beyond.

The Mission operates through a network of 14 lakh Anganwadi centres covering 10.16.32.173

beneficiaries comprising 63,68,698 pregnant women, 49,23,513 lactating mothers, 44,77,899 children aged 0-6 months, 3,85,66,938 children aged 6 months to 3 years, 4,31,06,548 children aged 3-6 years and 23,98,889 adolescent girls (14-18 years)⁶. The programme provides a comprehensive package of services, including supplementary nutrition in the form of Hot Cooked Meals (HCM) and Take-home Rations (THR). Early Childhood Care and Education, and health check-ups and immunisation (in convergence with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare). These centres also serve as platforms for promoting hygiene awareness among children and their families. Ways through which Mission Poshan 2.0 constantly contributes to better WASH practices for all include the following:

- Focus on community-based events (CBEs) and home visits includes hygiene education and demonstration. Since 2018, more than 7 crore CBEs have been conducted at Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) that have motivated participants to adopt better WASH practices. Similarly, nearly 2 crore home visits are conducted on a monthly basis for children 0-2 years and Pregnant Women, and Learning Mothers have been sensitised on WASH along with other mandated topics.

- Children are particularly vulnerable to the effects of inadequate WASH conditions. The lack of hygiene in early childhood settings not only affects health outcomes but also school readiness and performance. Therefore, MoWCD has earmarked funds for the construction of toilets and the supply of piped water in AWCs. States/UTs are constantly encouraged to construct toilets and get piped water connections in AWCs. Currently, 10.27 lakh AWCs have functional toilets, and 12.53 lakh have drinking water sources/ facilities.
- Further, as sustainable WASH implementation requires more than infrastructure, community involvement, behavioural change, and inter-sectoral collaboration, the Ministry is collaborating with ministries/departments and other stakeholders through Jan Aashrits celebrated every year, i.e., Poshan Maas in September and Poshan Pikkawade in March - April. So far, more than 3.8 crore sanitation activities on WASH have been reported by States/UTs since 2018.
- To strengthen, upgrade and rejuvenate the Anganwadi Centres for improved nutrition and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) delivery for stimulating social, emotional, cognitive and intellectual development of children under 6 years of age, it was decided to upgrade 2 lakh AWCs into 'Saksham Anganwadi Centres' during the Fifteenth Finance Commission Cycle. Envisioned as second-generation Anganwadi Centres, Saksham Anganwadis have better infrastructure, including LED screens, water filtration systems, material for ECCE and Poshan Dakhos. To be eligible for upgradation to Saksham Anganwadi, an Anganwadi centre must fulfil the basic condition of having Drinking Water Facilities and Functional Toilets.
- Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) focuses on nutritional, health, and hygiene education of around 23 lakh adolescent girls in the age 14-18 years from NE States and Aspirational Districts. It supports menstrual hygiene awareness. The scheme trains peer educators to promote hygiene practices among girls in the community.
- Another notable example is the 'Special Campaign 3.0', which emphasised cleanliness drives across Anganwadi centres and public spaces. The campaign highlighted the importance of maintaining a

hygienic environment and mobilised community volunteers and officials to participate actively in Swachhata (Cleanliness). By involving community members and local governance structures, these programmes foster ownership and sustainability of WASH practices.

By ensuring access to clean water, proper sanitation, and handwashing stations within Anganwadi Centres, the Ministry is creating a safe and nurturing environment for children. Hygiene promotion is woven into daily activities and interactions, helping children adopt healthy behaviours early in life. These behaviours not only protect individual children but also reduce the spread of infectious diseases within communities, amplifying the benefits of WASH across social and economic dimensions.

2. **Mission Shakti (Including Beti, Bachao Beti Padhao):** Campaigns like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) play a key role in helping this endeavour. This campaign not only focuses on eliminating gender bias but also incorporates hygiene and sanitation components, promoting the idea that the well-being of girls is essential for national development. These interventions collectively aim to break the cycle of gender inequality that often begins with girls dropping out of school due to poor sanitation or menstrual challenges.

3. **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMVY):** While primarily a maternity benefit programme, it encourages antenatal care and counselling on hygiene during pregnancy and childcare. thereby, it is indirectly promoting clean environments for mothers and infants.

4. **Ministry Initiatives:** It has an earmarked component named Swachhata Action Plan (SAP) under which funds are provided to States and UTs for taking up activities related to WASH in the Child Care Institutions (CCIs) and service delivery structures. The States/UTs prepare an 'Annual Calendar' for taking up activities under SAP. Thus, through its targeted policies and community-driven programmes, the Ministry of Women and Child Development in India is leveraging WASH as a powerful enabler of gender equality and child well-being. Continued support, innovation, and commitment will be critical to ensuring that every woman and child, regardless of geography or background, has access to the life-changing benefits of WASH (2).



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Har Ghar Jal

Jal Jeevan Mission has seeded a new consciousness around water in rural India. It has redefined the role of government from provider to facilitator, of communities from beneficiaries to custodians, and of infrastructure from an end to a means. Water, once a vector of deprivation, is fast becoming an instrument of dignity, resilience, and empowerment. That is the promise, and the power, of Har Ghar Jal.

Water, the most fundamental of natural resources, has always shaped the destiny of civilisations. In India, where rivers have inspired faith, rituals, livelihoods, and politics, water is not just a resource; it is a cultural and developmental imperative. Yet, access to safe, adequate, and regular drinking water has eluded millions of Indians for decades, particularly in rural areas. The launch of Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in August 2019 marked a historic intervention by the Government of India to rectify this injustice and institutionalise a new grammar of rural water governance.

JJM was envisioned with a clear quantifiable target: to provide a Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) to every rural household. But beyond the numerical ambition lies a deeper structural transformation – one that brings sustainability, equity, decentralisation, and community participation to the centre of India's rural water discourse.

What the Data Tells Us

As of May 2023, over 15.62 crore rural households, accounting for nearly 60%, have been provided with piped water supply under JJM. In a country where, until a few years ago, women walked miles for water, this statistic signifies a silent but revolutionary shift.

Eight states and three Union Territories (UT) – Goa, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Punjab, Telangana, Mizoram, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Andaman &

Nikobar Islands, Puducherry and Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu have achieved 100% coverage. Uttarakhand, Lakshadweep, Bihar, Nagaland, Sikkim and Ladakh are above 90% and all other States and UTs are above 57%.



Over 15.62 crore rural households have the tap

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Many watershed districts, once lagging in development indices, have demonstrated remarkable pace and innovation under JM. 70.1% of the households in these districts now have tap water connections. This was only 3.77% in 2019. In schools and anganwadis too, the current coverage is more than 89.57% and 85.54% respectively.

Yes, JM is not a scheme of short-lived milestones. Its true metric of success lies in the sustainability of service delivery ensuring that taps do not run dry, that water meets prescribed quality standards, and that systems are managed locally with accountability.

From Infrastructure to Public Service

Infrastructure creation is an essential first step. But water security cannot be reduced to hardware installations. Functionality in JM is measured by three benchmarked outcomes: quantity, quality, and regularity. This means that every tap must provide at least 55 litres per capita per day, meet BIS 10500 drinking water standards, and operate with consistency.

Functionality assessments conducted periodically reveal important insights. While infrastructure coverage may be high in several regions, service reliability still varies due to factors such as source fragility, power availability, grievance redressal systems, and varied operations and maintenance (O&M) mechanisms.

To address this, the Mission has embedded real-time monitoring, demand-responsive feedback loops, and embedded accountability through tools such as Jal Jeeva Surveksha. Institutionalising this level of functionality requires both capacity and culture change – reimagining Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) as agile, citizen-responsive entities rather than legacy bureaucratic structures.

Ensuring Scheme Sustainability

Sustainability of drinking water schemes is not a static outcome but a dynamic process. It ensures uninterrupted access to safe and adequate drinking water even during periods of stress. This is achieved through integrated planning that balances technical soundness with social equity, gender inclusivity, and local preferences. Four interdependent dimensions define this sustainability framework:

1. **Source Sustainability:** Maintaining reliable, year-round water availability through aquifer recharge, rainwater harvesting, and rejuvenation of traditional water bodies.



On a sunny day, tap water gives a warm smile

2. **Institutional Sustainability:** Strengthening institutions like Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSC), District Water and Sanitation Missions (DWSM), and State Water and Sanitation Missions (SWSM) to manage operations effectively.
3. **Financial Sustainability:** Leveraging convergence funds and enabling communities to recover O&M costs through locally determined, inclusive models.
4. **Social & Environmental Sustainability:** Ensuring stakeholder participation and safe disposal of wastewater, creating systems that are both people-centric and ecologically viable.

By anchoring sustainability in community-led planning and convergence-based action, JM seeks to future-proof rural water supply systems and prevent scheme slippage across the design horizon.

No piped water system can function sustainably without a viable source. And yet, source depletion, groundwater over-extraction, and erratic rainfall patterns threaten rural water security in many parts of India. JM addresses this by mandating plans that include aquifer recharge, watershed development, spring-shed management (especially in the Himalayan and Northeastern regions), afforestation, and rejuvenation of traditional water bodies.

The Jal Jeeva Abhyas – Catch the Rain campaign reinforces this effort through convergence with the Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, and other key stakeholders. Source sustainability demands that communities be empowered to view water as a shared, cyclical resource, not an extractive commodity.

Case Study: Kotri Village – A Model of Sustainable Water Governance

In the heart of Rajasthan's arid landscape, nestled in the Aravalli range, is Pratapgarh District. One Kotri, a village that once grappled with the daily struggle for clean water for the 350 tribal households scattered across its two habitations, accessing potable water meant relying on public standposts and hand pumps under the scorching sun. These sources were often plagued by turbidity and contamination, making every drop a potential health hazard.

The intervention of JNM marked a turning point for Kotri. By July 2024, every household had been equipped with tap connections, ensuring a steady and reliable supply of clean water. However, the journey didn't end with infrastructure. The real challenge lay in sustainable operation and maintenance (O&M) of the water systems. Initially, there was a lack of clarity about the community's role in water governance and minimal implementation of O&M policies.

Bridging this gap, the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC), supported by the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) and UNICEF, stepped in. Through capacity-building exercises, strategic planning, and community mobilisation, the VWSC was empowered to take full ownership of the

village's water supply. This participatory approach began with initial engagement and mobilisation, followed by detailed capacity-building sessions on O&M, tariff collection, and financial management. A critical component was the development of a handover checklist, ensuring a smooth and well-documented transition of responsibilities from PHED to the VWSC.

Financial sustainability emerged as a key outcome of these efforts. By collecting water tariffs from residents, the VWSC accumulated Rs 11.54 lakh by March 2024, with a monthly surplus of Rs 15,000 earmarked for future O&M activities. The establishment of a dedicated bank account for water supply management further ensured that funds were available for ongoing maintenance and repairs.

A unique aspect of Kotri's success has been the role of women in ensuring water quality. Five women from the village were trained to conduct chemical and bacteriological tests using Field Test Kits. Their involvement not only contributed to ensuring safe water but also empowered them to become key decision-makers in the VWSC. This proactive approach to water safety has ensured that the community remains vigilant about maintaining high water quality standards.

With increased piped water access, comes an increase in household wastewater – greywater from kitchens, bathrooms, and laundry areas. Recognising this, JNM integrates greywater management as a key sustainability pillar. Localised and low-tech solutions, such as soak pits, septic pits, kitchen gardens, and constructed wetlands are being promoted at the household and community level. The principle is clear: wastewater should not become waste; it must be repurposed.

In states like Uttar Pradesh, innovative community-based systems are being piloted and scaled. Greywater management, also converging with other flagship schemes like Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), reinforcing resource pooling and integrated planning.

A promising model is from Chitrana village in Rajasthan's (Barmer district, where a Decentralised Wastewater Treatment System (DEWATS) has been introduced. The system collects greywater from around

250 households through a simple pipeline network, which feeds into a large, compartmentalised tank. Here, the waste passes through natural processes to reduce its biological and chemical oxygen demand (BOD and COD), making it safe for reuse. The cleaned water is then used by the community for agricultural and irrigation needs, reducing pressure on groundwater sources. This initiative demonstrates how a combination of local engagement, practical engineering, and ecological sensitivity can transform wastewater into a valuable resource.

Technology as an Enabler

In the evolving scenario of rural piped water supply governance, addressing the gaps at the State, District, and local levels is crucial for ensuring efficient and reliable service delivery. JNM has introduced real-time digital dashboards at the Village level (VWSM dashboard), District Level (DWSM dashboard), and State Level (SWSM dashboard). These dashboards empower key stakeholders, such as Sopsanhar and Panchayat Secretaries at the village level, District

Collectors, District-level CEOs, and Executive Engineers at the district level, and State Minister, Directors, Chief Secretaries, and PHED heads at the state level – with timely, actionable insights. By making critical information readily accessible, these digital platforms are bridging governance gaps and enabling more effective planning, monitoring, and management of rural piped water supply schemes. JIM Dashboard is a public transparency tool that tracks state-wise progress, village-wise coverage, and scheme status.

Internet of Things (IoT) based water quality sensors, grievance redressal portals, mobile apps for community members, and asset-mapping tools are being used to ensure responsiveness, efficiency, and transparency. One of the key platforms under this effort is the Water Quality Management Information System (WQMIS), which provides a centralized interface for managing water quality data collected through field test kits and laboratory analysis, aiding in timely detection and resolution of water quality issues. To date, 2,183 water quality testing laboratories have been established across the country, ensuring widespread access to water testing facilities.

Complementing these infrastructural developments is a significant emphasis on community engagement. More than 24,833 lakh women have been trained to use Field Testing Kits (FTKs), enabling them to conduct on-the-spot water quality assessments in their villages.

To make data easily accessible to citizens, the Citizens Corner (available on the JIM portal) allows residents to view the status of water supply schemes, water quality data, and other relevant information about their villages. The underlying philosophy, however, remains clear – technology must support decentralised governance, not centralised control. Digital tools can strengthen monitoring, but they cannot replace the collective consciousness required to manage water sustainably.

Institutionalising Participation

Perhaps the most radical feature of JIM is its attempt to invert the power pyramid of water governance. At the heart of the Mission is the belief that villagers know their water best. Over 6.34 lakh Village Water & Sanitation Committees (VWSCs) have been formed. These are 10-15 membered bodies, with 50% women representation, responsible for planning, implementation, operation, and maintenance. In many states, Self-Help Groups and women's collectives are taking charge of water quality testing, meter repairs, and tariff collection.

The road ahead for JIM is deeply rooted in *Jai Shiksha* – people's participation. This participatory model ensures that water systems are not externally imposed but internally owned, maintained, and respected. Panchajanya Raj Institutions, VWSCs, and community-based organisations will serve as the front line in driving behavioural change, retaining infrastructure, and creating a culture of shared responsibility.

The *Net Jal Mitra* Programme (NJMP) is another remarkable step in this direction. The *Net Jal Mitra* or the field-level operator are capacitated for the daily upkeep and smooth functioning of rural water system. Acting as the operational arm of the VWSCs, NJMs are being equipped to manage pumps, valves, treatment units, and monitor water quality using field testing kits. With the support of digital tools, they record operational data, report system issues, and support preventive maintenance activities. Regular training ensures they stay updated with protocols and contribute meaningfully to efficient, transparent, and responsive service delivery.

The path ahead requires agility and convergence. Difficult geographies, such as tribal belts, LWE-affected areas, and climate fragile zones, need precision delivery models, community waste management, and hyper-local innovation. As the Mission moves beyond linear expansion to systemic consolidation, it must double down on two fronts: inclusive governance and adaptive resilience. Water quality challenges (fluoride, arsenic, salinity), urban-rural overlaps, and seasonality-linked stress points must be integrated into a comprehensive risk register.

The maturity of JIM will be measured not just by tap coverage, but by its ability to manage shocks, strengthen co-creation, and democratise control over one of humanity's most vital resources. JIM has needed a new consciousness around water in rural India. It has redefined the role of government from provider to facilitator, of communities from beneficiaries to custodians, and of infrastructure from an end to a means. The future will certainly not depend on budgets alone, but on vigilance, local stewardship, and long-term ecological thinking. To sustain this vision, we must continue to invest in people, processes, and partnerships. Water, once a vector of deprivation, is becoming an instrument of dignity, resilience, and empowerment. That is the promise, and the power, of *Net Jal Mitra*. □



Water Wisdom in Action

India faces an enormous challenge: to secure water for a population exceeding 1.4 billion and nearly 6.5 lakh villages. Through initiatives like Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain, Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari, and BWUE (Bureau of Water Use Efficiency), India is cultivating more than infrastructure; it is nurturing a national movement—an ethos of shared responsibility, resilience, and renewal.

The metaphorical idea that “water doesn’t waste, it adapts” is reflective of the inherent resilient and flexible nature of this precious gift of nature. If humans were to adopt the wisdom of water, life would be a Zen-like breeze. Flowing, adapting, and finding paths around obstacles.

However, if water were to write her biography, she would say, “I’ve been flowing for eons, shaping the earth, quenching thirst, sustaining life. I remember my early days flowing from glaciers, carving rivers, creating lakes and supporting life. I have found men as of living in harmony with nature of yore. But I am seeing my beauty marred by human neglect in modern times. I feel the pain of pollution, I choke on plastic, I have to consume pesticides, and I inhale industrial effluents. My rivers have been ravaged, my coasts wrecked, and my sources depleted. So sometimes in anger, I unleash as drought and flood as flood. But despite the wounds inflicted upon me, I remain resilient. I respond positively to any call to action to protect me, to preserve me, to use me judiciously, but most important of all to respect me as the foundation of life, the nourisher of Earth.”

In India, water is indeed more than just a commodity—it’s a culture, a way of life, and an integral part of the country’s heritage. Some of India’s rivers are considered sacred and worshipped as goddesses, and water plays a crucial role in festivals, celebrations, rituals, and ceremonies. For thousands of years, communities have been brought together with many villages and towns centered around wells, tanks, and rivers. Water has indeed

been wise, and so have been our ancestors, in cherishing and nourishing it. Water Wisdom is deeply rooted in our values and traditions, where our forefathers grew with water and not against it.

India, with its vast land area of about 329 million hectares, is also marked by incredible geographical diversity. This diverse landscape not only influences water availability but also shapes our way of life, economy, and traditions. Across this varied geography, our ancestors developed water systems that reflected deep insight. In Rajasthan, *Baoris*—beautifully designed multi-tiered structures—collected rainwater underground to prevent evaporation and served as gathering places for communities. In Maharashtra, the *Phad* system allowed small farmers to jointly manage water from tanks and reservoirs, ensuring fair and efficient use. In Nagaland, the *Shoo* system combined water conservation with forest protection and terraced farming—showing how communities lived in harmony with nature. In Tamil Nadu, a network of *Eri* tanks—ascending artificial lakes—supported irrigation, livestock, and fisheries and recharged groundwater. These tanks were managed by community rules that ensured sustainability for generations.

What binds these traditional systems is a set of core principles: harvesting rainwater at the source to reduce wastage, storing water underground or in natural containers to prevent evaporation, equitable sharing of water among users, and protecting catchment areas. While maintaining ecological balance, water was

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viewed not just as a commodity but as communal heritage requiring rituals, social contracts, and collective responsibility. This tradition helped communities adapt to monsoon variability, droughts, and floods with remarkable resilience.

Colonisers significantly impacted water policy in India and disrupted the healthy symbiotic relationship between water and the people. The British laws introduced the common law principles that emphasised the right of landowners to water, known as riparian rights. This allowed landowners to use surface water on their land and gave them unlimited rights to access groundwater. They also strengthened state control over surface water, weakening people's customary rights. Colonisation led to a shift away from traditional water management practices, which were often more sustainable and equitable.

The British legacy of prioritising economic development and resource extraction over sustainable water management was carried forward into post-independence India. The importance of water as a limited resource was not widely lost in early policy makers of India, but its value was often overruled in favour of economic development and agricultural growth. Water governance was fragmented, with multiple agencies and laws governing different aspects of water management. In recent years, however, there has been a growing recognition of water's importance as a limited natural

resource. The National Water Policy of 2012 emphasises conservation, sustainable use, and integrated water resource management.

According to the National Commission for Integrated Water Resource Development (NCIWRD, 1995), India's water demand is projected to reach 843 billion cubic meters (BCM) by 2025 and soar further to 1,180 BCM by 2050. This rising demand sharply contrasts with the country's renewable water availability of approximately 1,126 BCM, signalling a looming crisis that calls for urgent and decisive action.

Reviving traditional water wisdom is not about romanticising the past but about blending ancient insight with modern technology and governance to create resilient, sustainable water systems. The challenge lies in harnessing the best of both worlds. Recognising this urgency, the Government of India launched the National Water Mission (NWM) in 2009 as part of the National Action Plan on Climate Change. The NWM focuses on water conservation, equitable distribution, increasing water use efficiency, ensuring integrated water resource management, and promoting conservation through participatory and decentralised approaches.

Water conservation has emerged as an essential pillar of India's sustainable development agenda. The imperative is clear: water conservation must permeate every level of governance—from grassroots communities to national policy frameworks. The Prime



Some notable glimpses of IWACTR

Minister has been a consistent and vocal champion of this cause, emphasising that conserving water is not only a government responsibility but a collective social duty requiring the active participation of every citizen. His motto—'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-society' approach to water management.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued a nation call for 'Jal Shakti 4 Jal Shakti' in his Mann Ki Baat address in June 2019, emphasising the transformative power of collective efforts, traditional water wisdom, and grassroots participation in addressing India's pressing water challenges.

His call to action inspired the launch of the Jal Shakti Abhiyan (JSA) in 2019, a mass movement for water security in a mission mode approach, focusing on urgent water conservation efforts across 1,692 water-stressed blocks in 256 districts. JSA represents not just a campaign but a movement to rekindle the age-old spirit of water stewardship embedded in India's cultural ethos. It mobilises communities, local authorities, and the government alike to revive water bodies, recharge groundwater, and adopt efficient water-use practices, thereby ensuring water security for generations to come.

In 2021, the campaign was significantly expanded into the Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain (JSA-CTR), guided by the resonant tagline, 'Catch the Rain, Where It Falls, Where It Falls!'. This phase marked a reinvigorated national effort to harness every drop of rain through a combination of robust planning and community-driven action. It emphasised localised interventions, active citizen participation, and transparent implementation.

The 2024 campaign theme, 'Nari Shakti or Jal Shakti', recognised the indispensable role of women in managing and safeguarding water resources. By positioning women as leaders, decision-makers, and custodians, the campaign is fostering inclusive and sustainable water governance, ensuring that conservation efforts are not only effective but also socially transformative.

Since its inception, the campaign has achieved remarkable success: over 1.71 crore water conservation structures have been completed—including check dams, gabion structures, contour trenches, and rooftop rainwater harvesting systems. More than 139 crore saplings have been planted, improving watershed health and enhancing soil moisture retention. Additionally, over Rs. 1.17 lakh crore has been mobilised under MGNREGS to support these efforts, linking water conservation with rural livelihoods and sustainable development.

Traditional water bodies have been revived through desilting, removal of encroachments, and aquifer management. The introduction of digital platforms like the JSA portal has brought greater transparency and accountability. To further institutionalise these gains, 712 Jal Shakti Kendras have been established across the country, acting as decentralised hubs for community engagement, technical guidance, and coordination. Furthermore, 634 District Scientific Water Conservation Plans have been developed using GIS mapping and hydrological data, empowering local administrations to craft tailored, evidence-based strategies.

These efforts have yielded significant results, reflected in the Ground Water Resources Assessment Report of 2024, showing an increase in groundwater recharge of 1136 billion cubic metres (BCM) from 2017, through tanks, ponds, and water conservation structures, surpassing even the live storage capacity of 8.75 BCM of the Indira Sage Dam.

Building on the success of the JSA-CTR, the Jal Shakti Jai Shagun (JSJ) campaign was launched in September 2024 with an ambitious target to create one million functional groundwater recharge structures by May 2025. This campaign focuses on decentralised, eco-friendly water conservation measures such as rainwater harvesting structures, recharge wells, borewell recharge, recharge pits, soak pits, etc., that directly increase groundwater levels, stabilise agro-ecosystems, hedge water scarcity during lean periods for domestic consumption and improve soil moisture quality.

In a short span, JSJ has successfully created 2.2 million water conservation structures with 1.8 million completed structures, as on 27 May 2025, far exceeding the target of one million. This success of JSJ is underpinned by a convergence and inclusive funding model that combines government schemes such as MGNREGS, AMBUT, and PMKSY with private sector contributions, including CSR funds, philanthropic donations, individual donors, and crowdfunding. This integrated financial approach secures broad-based participation, community ownership, and long-term sustainability. To maintain transparency and quality, all interventions are monitored through the GIS-based Jal Shakti Dashboard and regularly verified by technical experts. States like Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Karnataka, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh have demonstrated that decentralised, community-led systems are not only viable and swift but also highly cost-effective, in rural and border



regions, these efforts are empowering communities and strengthening local water resilience. Most importantly, the success of this initiative rests on the collective contributions of NGOs, Self-Help Groups, industries, and multiple stakeholders making it a truly Pan-India effort achieved in a remarkably short time.

Building on this momentum, JIS 2.0 has commenced from 1 July 2025, with an enhanced target of 2 million recharge structures—further advancing the mission for watershed community action for a water-secure future.

Under the Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari (JSB) initiative, several innovative, community-driven models have emerged to promote sustainable groundwater conservation. The Narmadahoosai or Narmadahoosai Model enables individuals working in Gujarat to fund borewell recharge projects in their native states, fostering ecological and ecological ties. The Abner School Building Model, developed with the Sehgal Foundation, integrates rooftop rainwater harvesting and sanitation facilities into schools, turning infrastructure into educational tools. In Punjab, the CRIDA-Hydrologic Model brings together builders and hydrologists to create low-cost recharge practices at just Rs 1,000 per acre. Meanwhile, the Ganga Trust NCD Model unites NGOs, philanthropists, and local communities with shared responsibilities for construction and resource support. These models exemplify cost-effective, participatory, and scientifically sound approaches to water conservation, reinforcing India's grassroots-led water security efforts.

The Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain 2025 campaign was jointly launched by the Union Minister

Jai Shakti, C B Patel, and Chief Minister of Haryana, Nayab Singh Saini, on 27 March 2025, World Water Day, at Panchajanya, with the theme, 'Jai Sanchay Jan Bhagidari Jan Jagratke # Dr. The Abhiyan reaffirms our collective resolve to ensure water conservation as a national movement and reaffirms the shared responsibility of every citizen in safeguarding this precious resource.

Water Use Efficiency (WUE) is also a key pillar for sustainable management, and India's traditional systems have always emphasized optimizing water allocation and minimizing losses. The Ministry of Jal Shakti is also championing water-efficient practices through the Bureau of Water Use Efficiency in various sectors, to reduce water footprint and protect ecosystems.

India faces an enormous challenge to secure water for a population exceeding 1.4 billion and nearly 65 lakh villages. However, this also presents an unparalleled opportunity. If every village established just one well-maintained recharge structure, the country's hydrological future can be transformed. This vision aligns with the 5 R's Mantra of sustainable water management: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recharge, and Respect. Water is not merely a resource to be exploited but a living force to be honored and protected.

Through initiatives like Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain, Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari, and BWUE, coupled with enthusiastic participation of states and empowered communities, India is cultivating more than infrastructure, it is nurturing a national movement—an ethos of shared responsibility, resilience, and renewal.

Water Wisdom blends the best of both worlds: It leverages traditional practices—the rainwater harvesting, community ownership, and decentralized management—with innovations such as GIS mapping, sensor networks, and real-time monitoring. This synthesis not only addresses the pressing water challenges of today but also builds a resilient foundation for future generations. Every village's ancestral water knowledge, every recharge structure built, and every community empowered represent a vital investment in India's durable resilience and sustainable development.

In this collective journey, every citizen becomes a custodian of water's enduring legacy; a legacy that sustains life, supports livelihoods, and nurtures the planet. ☐

(The co-author, Ramanaa Chakraborty, is the director of National Water Mission.)



From Toilets to Taps

The journey from toilets to taps is more than an infrastructure project—it is a transformation in public health, gender equity, and rural development. For millions of rural women, a toilet represents dignity, safety, and freedom. A tap connection signifies health, opportunity, and empowerment. The availability of water at the doorstep is easing the burden on women and girls, enhancing quality of life, and fostering self-reliance.

In the heartlands of rural India, a revolution is unfolding—transforming lives, empowering communities, and redefining the nation's development narrative from toilets to taps. Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) are fundamental to human health, economic development, and environmental sustainability. In rural India, the journey from inadequate sanitation and unsafe drinking water to improved WASH services has been nothing short of transformative. The Government of India's two flagship initiatives—Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G) and Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), have catalysed a monumental shift in the WASH sector, turning age-old challenges into opportunities for growth and resilience.

Once dubbed the 'Defecation capital of the world,' India—the world's largest democracy—has changed the global perception by declaring itself Open Defecation Free (ODF) on 2 October 2019, an achievement realised 11 years ahead of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 target set by the United Nations.

Before SBM-G, rural India faced a dire sanitation crisis. Open defecation was rampant, with only 35% of the rural population having access to proper sanitation facilities. This practice not only posed severe health risks but also compromised the dignity, safety, and well-being of women and children. Waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera, and typhoid were widespread,

contributing significantly to child mortality.

Launched on 2 October 2014 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Swachh Bharat Mission aimed to eliminate open defecation across the country by 2019. However, the mission was not solely about constructing toilets. It represented a movement for behavioural change, breaking deeply ingrained habits, promoting toilet technologies, converting waste to wealth, ensuring community participation, leveraging public financing, and demonstrating strong political will.

By October 2019, over 10 crore toilets had been constructed, and rural India was declared ODF a feat that secured historical milestones.



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The mission's success lies not just in numbers but in shifting mindsets. Through mass awareness campaigns, community mobilization, and the involvement of local leaders, sanitation became a collective responsibility. Innovations such as twin-pit toilet technology, which enables in-situ treatment of waste, demonstrated sustainable solutions adapted to rural contexts.

Above all, SBM-G redefined sanitation as a matter of dignity, especially for women and girls. Prior to the mission, millions of rural women and girls were forced to defecate in the open, often in unsafe environments, before dawn or after dark. The construction of household toilets restored their privacy, ensured safety, and upheld their dignity, fundamentally transforming their daily lives.

Once sanitation was addressed with providing toilets, the next imperative was ensuring reliable access to safe drinking water. Jal Jeeva Mission was launched on 15 August 2019 with the ambitious goal of providing functional household tap connections (HHTCs) to every rural household. At the mission's inception, only 17% of rural households had tap water connections. As of July 2023, the figure has surged to 80.98%, translating to over 15.68 crore households enjoying safe and adequate drinking water at their doorstep.

This transformation carries profound socio-economic implications. According to a WHO report, achieving 100% rural tap water coverage could save approximately 1.5 crore hours of time every day. With tap connections in place, women and girls, who traditionally bore the burden of water collection, are now reclaiming their time for education, livelihoods, and leadership, enhancing their socio-economic empowerment and overall well-being.

Women and girls face unique challenges in accessing safe WASH services. Inadequate sanitation exposes them to gender-based violence, especially when using distant and unsafe defecation sites. Managing menstruation with dignity also becomes difficult in the absence of clean and private facilities. Before SBM-G, many women were forced to wait until nightfall to relieve themselves, putting their health and safety at risk.

Water-related challenges are similarly gendered. Women and girls often walk long distances to fetch water, a task that affects their health, schooling, and economic productivity, while exposing them to physical strain and potential harm. Insufficient and unclean water also affects menstrual hygiene, children's, and



WASH services spreading smiles in the rural community

nutrition. However, prevailing social norms frequently exclude women from decision-making roles in water governance, deepening existing inequalities.

Recognizing these intersecting challenges, both SBM-G and JIM have embedded gender-sensitive approaches within their frameworks. Thousands of women have been trained in twin-pit toilet construction technology and become *Kudamustri* while others have taken on roles as Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) trainers or joined *Agram* forwells. The missions also encourage women's active participation in Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSCs), ensuring their voices shape the planning and implementation of WASH interventions.

Community participation, or *Jeev Bhigad*, is the cornerstone of both SBM-G and JIM. These missions emphasize the importance of people's involvement not just as beneficiaries but as active stakeholders in the design, execution, and monitoring of projects. Under JIM, every village has formed a VWSC responsible for preparing Village Action Plans (VAPs), overseeing infrastructure work, managing operations and maintenance, and conducting regular water quality testing—fostering transparency, accountability, and ownership. Similarly, under SBM-G, community engagement has been critical in achieving and sustaining ODF status and implementing ODF Plus



Women draw fresh water from SHS well in India

initiatives such as solid and liquid waste management, *Swachhagrahis* and *Mgnani Shaktis* have played key roles in behaviour change campaigns, transforming sanitation into a people-led movement.

The integration of SBM-C and IJM represents a holistic and synergistic approach to WASH. While SBM-C tackled the sanitation challenge, IJM addressed the water

supply aspect—together, they create a comprehensive ecosystem for public health and environmental sustainability. This integration is evident in initiatives like groundwater management, which treats and reuses household wastewater, promoting conservation and reducing pollution.

The journey from toilets to taps is more than an infrastructure project—it is a transformation in public health, gender equity, and rural development. For millions of rural women, a toilet represents dignity, safety, and freedom. A tap connection signifies health, opportunity, and empowerment. The availability of water at the doorstep is easing the burden on women and girls, enhancing quality of life, and fostering self-reliance.

As India advances towards SDG 2.0 and the universal coverage goals of DM, the models and lessons from this remarkable journey will serve as blueprints for future sustainable development initiatives.

As the adage goes, "Cleanliness is next to godliness" and "Water is life"—reflecting the essential roles sanitation and water play in our lives. In India's case, both are pivotal for progress, prosperity, and public health, marking a profound shift in how the nation safeguards the dignity and well-being of its rural citizens. □



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Making Every Drop Count

Jal Jeevan Mission in rural India is catalysing a silent yet transformative revolution. JJM builds a future where rural communities are not just recipients of water services, but capable managers of them, ensuring that every drop continues to reach every home—today, tomorrow, and for generations to come. While the Mission has already achieved remarkable milestones in coverage expansion, the real challenge lies beyond the tap—in ensuring that every drop delivered is sustainable, safe, affordable, and reliable for years to come.

Water is life, and in rural India, this truth is deeply woven into every aspect of community existence—agriculture, health, livelihoods, and social harmony. Yet, the journey of rural India's drinking water story has been anything but straightforward. Historically, rural communities depended on locally available sources—wells, ponds, rivers, and traditional harvesting structures like *baolis* or step wells and tanks. An age-old common practice for rainwater harvesting and storage, locally known as *Tankas*, is found in arid regions like western Rajasthan. Tracing back further, *baolis* are found in different parts of northern plains. Few gravity-based engineering marvels are even found in semi-arid regions like Biharpur, Madhya Pradesh where underground water harvesting systems were developed to provide water for large concentrations of soldiers and local population. These systems, managed by communities through customary practices, sustained generations.

However, as population grew, lifestyles changed, and water use intensified, these age-old systems began to falter. Overextraction, extraction became rampant, water quality issues like fluoride, arsenic, and salinity emerged, and erratic rainfall patterns due to climate change further strained the fragile balance. Recognizing



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By focusing on capacity building and skill development, JM is ensuring efficient operation & maintenance of water supply systems

this growing crisis, successive governments launched various drinking water programmes—from the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) in 1972, to the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) in 2009. While these initiatives improved access, they also focused more on infrastructure creation at the community level than on sustainable service delivery at the household level or people's ownership. This gap paved the way for the Jal Jeeva Mission (JMJ) in 2019, a flagship initiative of the Government of India that aims to ensure *har Ghar Jal*—functional household tap connections for every rural household with assured quality and quantity. With huge public investments coming into place, rural drinking water governance altogether started changing.

As evident, drinking water governance involves the systems, provisions, and frameworks—political, social, economic, and administrative—that guide decision-making for the sustainable management and service delivery of safe and secured drinking water. Under the Constitution of India, water is classified as a state subject as per Entry 17 of the State List in the Seventh Schedule, placing the onus of its governance, management, and distribution—including

issues related to drinking water—mainly on state governments. However, the landscape of rural water governance underwent a transformative shift with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992.

This amendment made an attempt to institutionalise rural local self-governance by mandating the devolution of functions to Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) across 29 sectors defined in the Eleventh Schedule, with drinking water (Entry 11) being one of the critical domains. Through this framework, Gram Panchayats (GPs) were empowered to take charge of planning, implementing, and managing rural drinking water supply systems, reflecting local needs, geographic realities, and socio-cultural dynamics. *Nal Jeeva Mission*, building on the pillars of the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India, placed local governance institutions like GPs and Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSCs) at the centre of planning, implementation, operation, and maintenance. It brings together people, policies, and partnerships to transform water governance, making every drop count not just today, but for generations to come. Furthermore, JMJ in its second phase, aims to promote transparency and accountability by leveraging

digital platforms for monitoring purposes at State and district level to ensure the success and longevity of the water supply systems.

Key Principles and Components of Jal Jeevan Mission

At the heart of JJM lies a simple but powerful vision: to move from water supply as a government-delivered scheme to water service as a community-led responsibility. This marks a paradigm shift from engineering-driven, target-based approaches to people-centric, governance-led models. The mission rests on six foundational principles:

- **Service Delivery over Infrastructure Creation:** JJM is not just about laying pipes or installing taps. It is about ensuring that every household receives water of adequate quantity (55 litres per capita per day), of prescribed quality (as per BIS standards), on a regular basis, and at the doorstep.
- **Source Sustainability and Drinking Water Security:** Recognising that infrastructure is meaningless without water, JJM promotes source sustainability through local water conservation, recharge, and greywater management. Convergence with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Development Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), Watershed Programs, and other initiatives aims to ensure holistic management of water resources.
- **Promoting Local Governance:** PDS and VWSGs are entrusted with planning, implementation, operation and maintenance (O&M). This strengthens local governance, empowering these community institutions to become custodians of their water supply systems.
- **Water Quality Monitoring and Surveillance:** JJM emphasises building community-based water quality testing capabilities through Field Test Kits (FTKs) and sub-district laboratories, ensuring that water not only reaches every home but is safe to drink. The Mission has undertaken to build a cadre of 5 women from each village trained on water quality testing with FTKs.
- **Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening:** Recognising the need for enhancement of technical, financial and managerial competencies, the Mission supports training, handholding, and capacity building of all stakeholders—from Panchayat members to engineers, SHGs, and youth volunteers. The

programme also aims to build a cadre of multi-skilled local persons through the Nai Jal Mitra Programme. This programme identifies, trains, and deploys community-based individuals—especially youth and women—as Nai Jal Mitras not only ensuring regular operation, maintenance, and monitoring of rural water infrastructure but also generating sustainable livelihood opportunities within the village ecosystem.

- **Community engagement with spirit of Jan Andolan**—a people's movement. A community participatory approach is to be used to engage the community using different communication tools, promoting Jan Shiksha, with the principle of leaving no one behind. This will conserve and strengthen responsible drinking water use, ownership, driving a collective movement. Jan Andolan for drinking water conservation, and sustainable operation and maintenance (O&M) of rural based drinking water supply systems.

Building Synergies with other Flagship Programmes

One of the strongest aspects of Jal Jeevan Mission is its convergence with other national and local development programs, ensuring that water security is not treated in isolation but as part of the broader rural development and governance ecosystem. The Mission aligns seamlessly with key government initiatives such as:

- **MGNREGS:** Providing wage labour for water conservation, recharge, and greywater management activities at the village level.
- **Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin (SBM-G):** Promoting sanitation and solid liquid waste management, particularly grey water management, which complements safe water supply by improving overall village cleanliness and health outcomes.
- **Jan Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain (JSAR):** Focusing on catchment area treatment, afforestation, and water conservation structures to strengthen source sustainability.
- **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM):** Engaging Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in water governance, water quality testing, O&M, and community mobilisation, building economic and social capital at the grassroots.
- **POSHAN Abhiyan, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and Education Programs:** Leveraging health, nutrition, and school



From being critical to election posters, Jal Jeevan Mission is empowering women to lead from the front

networks to promote safe water usage, hygienic behaviour, and empower women and children as water stewards.

Improved Health and Hygiene Outcomes

JJM in rural India is catalysing a silent yet transformative revolution. With each household tap connection, the Mission is not only enhancing access to safe drinking water but also significantly contributing to improved public health outcomes and securing the future of millions across the country. A June 2023 study by the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that the mission could prevent nearly 400,000 diarrhoeal deaths and save 14 million Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs). That's not just a health win—it's an economic game-changer, amounting to savings of over USD 101 billion, or more than Rs 8 lakh crore.

The numbers are overwhelming, but the human stories behind them are even more compelling. Nobel Laureate Dr Michael Kremer and his research team have shown that universal access to clean water could cut infant mortality by nearly 39%, potentially saving 136,010 children under the age of five every year. In a country where child survival remains a national priority, these are not just statistics—they are lives reclaimed.

But the ripple effects of JJM go far beyond health. For generations, women and girls in rural India have walked miles every day to fetch water—a task so routine it was invisible. Today these footsteps are being replaced by aspirations. The World Health

Organisation (WHO) study estimates that JJM is saving rural households 5.58 more hours every day of which women account for 4.87 more hours. This newfound time is already being redirected towards education, income generation, and self-empowerment.

The economic impact is tangible. An SBI Research analysis highlights a rise in women's participation in agriculture and allied activities, directly linked to a dramatic reduction in time spent on water collection. Nearly 5 crore women who once fetched water from outside their homes are now engaged more meaningfully in productive work. And it's not just the women who are benefiting. Children, especially girls, are returning to school. With 15 lakh hours saved daily for school-aged boys and girls, classroom attendance is improving. The data reflects this shift: dropout rates at the secondary level have fallen from 17.5% in 2018-19 to 12.61% in 2021-22, according to UDISE+.

The JJM, while initially conceived as an infrastructure-driven initiative, is progressively evolving into a people-centric movement. Across rural India, every operational tap connection is transforming lives and reshaping the trajectory of development. Safe and adequate drinking water, once considered a challenge, is now being realised as a rightful entitlement of every citizen. Through this watershed, the nation is steadily advancing towards a healthier, more equitable, and empowered rural landscape.

From Dependency to Self-Reliance

While infrastructure provides the foundation, the true test of success lies in the day-to-day operation and long-term maintenance of rural water supply systems. Traditionally, these responsibilities fell solely on governmental departments, often leading to delayed repairs, breakdowns, and community dissatisfaction. Jal Jeevan Mission reimagines this by shifting ownership to the village itself, empowering GPs and VNSGs as local service providers responsible for running, maintaining, and sustaining the systems with support from Jal Jal Mitro and community-based organisations like SHC. This includes regular monitoring of water quantity and quality, preventive and corrective maintenance of pumps, pipelines, and treatment units, and ensuring timely tariff collection to cover operational costs. Empowered through capacity building, technical training, and access to skilled service providers, these local institutions are positioned to reduce downtime, improve service reliability, build a mechanism for financial

sustainability and create employment opportunities at the village level. By transforming O&M from an afterthought into a core pillar of governance, JFM builds a future where rural communities are not just recipients of water services, but capable managers of them, ensuring that every drop continues to reach every home—today, tomorrow and for generations to come.

The Road Ahead

The *Mission Mission* represents a historic shift—from viewing water supply as a one-time infrastructure project to recognizing it as a continuous public service, owned and managed by the very people it is meant to serve. While the Mission has already achieved remarkable milestones in coverage expansion, the real challenge lies beyond the tap—in ensuring that every drop delivered is sustainable, safe, affordable, and reliable for years to come.

In the extended phase of the Mission, the focus will shift towards establishing an enabling ecosystem for the effective O&M of rural piped water supply schemes. To achieve this, structural reforms in governance are essential to strengthen the rural drinking water service delivery system. This will necessitate a transformation of the existing administrative structure—from the present 'department-based' and construction of infrastructure development' approach to a 'utility-based' approach.

Under this approach, the in-village infrastructure of piped water supply schemes is to be managed by the respective GPs and (WSSCs) functioning as micro utilities. The out-village infrastructure will fall under the purview of State or Regional-level utilities, operating as macro utilities. Both levels of utility institutions must adopt a service delivery mindset, ensuring that their operations are citizen-centric, responsive, and accountable.

This transition calls for sustained political commitment, capacity building at the local level, and large-scale behavioural change to engage community. It also requires a shift in perspective—viewing every Gram Panchayat not merely as an administrative entity, but as a functional public utility capable of managing finances, overseeing operations, ensuring water quality, and engaging meaningfully with the community. Achieving this vision will demand cross-sectoral collaboration, integration of traditional knowledge with modern science, and active citizen participation at every stage.

As rural India stands at this transformative juncture, governance will make the difference between schemes that last a few years and systems that sustain for generations. Making every drop count is not just a technical task, but a governance revolution—one that turns villages into self-reliant water-secure communities, led by their people, for their people. **U**

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Light House Initiative

Light House Initiative (LHI) Phase-1 emerged in 2022 — a collaborative effort led by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS), in partnership with the India Sanitation Coalition (ISC) and the corporate sector. It brought to life localised models driven by community participation, convergence of government schemes, and targeted innovations.

India's rural sanitation story is one of transformation — from widespread open defecation to a nationwide movement for dignity, health and cleanliness following the launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission - Green (SBM-G) Phase I in 2014. This marked a historic leap, mobilising communities and governments alike in an unprecedented drive to construct over 10 crore toilets and declare the country Open Defecation Free (ODF) by 2019.

The declaration of ODF was not the end, though — it was the beginning of a deeper more complex challenge: sustaining gains, managing waste and embedding sanitation into the fabric of rural governance and daily life. Reimagining this SBM-G Phase II was rolled out in 2020-21, shifting the focus in building resilient villages that are the ODF Plus Model, integrating solid and liquid waste management, behaviour change and operation and maintenance (O&M).

It was within this evolving sanitation landscape that the Light House Initiative (LHI) Phase I emerged in 2022 — a collaborative effort led by the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS), in partnership with the India Sanitation Coalition (ISC) and the corporate sector. Its aim: support 75 Green Panchajati (GP) in becoming Light House GPs, marking the commemoration of 75 years of India's independence.

Phase 1 delivered more than proof of concept — it brought to life localised models driven by community

participation, convergence of government schemes, and targeted innovations. Many of the GPs that achieved Light House status even earned accolades at the state level. More importantly, the phase unearthed critical lessons in institutional capacity, funding alignment and the power of grassroots ownership — paving the way for the next phase of impact.

For instance, in Andhra Pradesh, six GPs in Guntur and Palnadu districts adopted a Rs 1 daily user fee for waste collection, achieving 60% segregation at source. With bins composting and integration into the circular economy, this intervention became a model for self-sustaining waste management. One of the selected LHI villages, Madhupalem, won the Healthy Grams Panchajati Award for its self-sustainable solid waste management model.

Transition to Phase 2

LHI Phase 1 proved that well-supported Green Panchajati can create model sanitation ecosystems. But transformation at scale requires a bigger canvas. The move from GPs to Blocks in Phase 2 was not just a logical next step — it was a strategic leap towards saturation, sustainability and systemic level change.

With the GPs achieving Light House status, the time was ripe to multiply that impact. By targeting entire Blocks, LHI Phase 2 has the potential to strengthen decentralised governance, enhance local capacities and ensure that every village in the Block moves together towards comprehensive sanitation.

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This scheme also aligns with India's global commitments, particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 6.2, which aims for equitable sanitation access for all by 2030. Phase 2 is a bold step in that direction — building not just toilets, but trust, ownership and resilience.

Key Features of LHI Phase 2

Scheduled from July 2024 to March 2025, Phase 2 will expand to 48 blocks across 37 districts spread over 14 States and Union Territories — Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

Its engine is a strong coalition of public purpose: the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS), the India Sanitation Coalition (ISC), and leading corporate partners ITC, Unilever, HCL, Kayara Energy, Janss Asia, ISPL, Hindalco and NIPES. Each Block under LHI Phase 2 will become a live demonstration of what ODF Plus Model sanitation can look like when powered by partnerships, local leadership and tailored support.

Objectives

LHI Phase 2 is grounded in a set of clear goals—contribute to the efforts of the Government of India and States/UTs in meeting the SDG Target 6.2, demonstrate ODF Plus Model blocks that would act as a lighthouse for other blocks and create opportunities for the private sector to support in the implementation of the ODF Plus Model endeavour.

It also aims to garner technical and managerial capabilities of corporates and leverage innovative, decentralised and responsive technologies, as well as Government sanitation Operations & Maintenance (O&M) models for Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) assets.



At its heart, the LHI Phase 2 initiative seeks to prove that sanitation systems can thrive when built by communities, for communities and with the right kind of support, knowledge and incentive.

Approach and Methodology

Building on insights from Phase 1, LHI Phase 2 strengthens what has proven effective — community leadership, data-driven decision-making, creative outreach and catalytic partnerships. A key focus is the integration of technology to support O&M, alongside prioritising the wider ecosystem of assets, the models and ensuring dedicated funding for O&M within program design. The initiative also embraces a holistic approach that prioritises inclusivity, equity and access, with particular attention to the needs of marginalised and underserved groups.

SHGs, Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSCs) and local champions are at the forefront in LHI Phase 2, planning and driving implementation with ownership. Innovative communication and outreach strategies have been developed and implemented to inform, influence and inspire rural local bodies in the implementation of SLWM arrangements and sustainability of gains. Credible, consistent and smart monitoring and measurement arrangements will inform the sector and facilitate decision support for the improvement of the programme.

The significance of effective communication strategies in bringing about sustainable change was highlighted in Bharvi Khawita GP located in Bhagpur District. Supported by ITC's Mission Samrithi Aai, this GP is realising its sanitation landscape through strategic Information, Education and Education (IEE) campaigns and community ownership. Once characterised by unclean streets and unmanaged waste, Khawita GP underwent a transformation driven by community engagement, SLWM infrastructure development and behaviour change communication (BCC). ITC supported the GP in building solid and liquid waste management systems, conducting awareness campaigns and training stakeholders. The visible impact—clean surroundings, proper waste channels and engaged citizens—became a model for replication in neighbouring villages. The GP's success reflects how structured support and community mobilisation can reverse chronic neglect in sanitation.

Showcasing the power of convergence and community-led sanitation planning, Malitha and Duhwadi GPs in Maheshwarpur Panchayat district undertook an analysis study through village walks, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises, surveys, focus group

and discussions with stakeholders to identify sanitation gaps and deployed BEC-led waste systems that aligned livelihood practices with community sanitation management. With ITC's support, the villages launched extensive BEC and BEC campaigns, including mural art and street plays. SHGs were trained in manage waste collection and composting operations, integrating livelihood creation with sanitation services. Both GPs attained QDF Plus Model status under LII Phase I and now serve as learning sites for surrounding villages under the LII framework.

Outcomes and Expected Impact

LII Phase 2 will create 43 blocks as corepiry models and establish sustainable O&M practices for SWM assets through active community involvement, including women's self-help groups (SHGs) and village water and sanitation committees (VWSCs). Corporate may provide bridge funding for these efforts, with the India Sanitation Coalition overseeing the monitoring and accuracy of physical and financial progress.

Case in point, Mitha GP in Gujarat's Navsari district transitioned from Nipping to QDF Plus Model status through improved infrastructure, toilet retrofitting and wastewater systems with support from Nipam Energy, showcasing effective corporate-GP collaboration. With focused support from the corporate partner, the GP introduced new sanitation infrastructure, reinforced existing individual household latrines (IHLL) and built comprehensive wastewater drainage systems. The partnership also included skill building for local sanitation workers and the use of Visual BEC tools for behaviour change. This case highlights the speed and effectiveness of corporate-led interventions when aligned with GP-level planning and ownership.

Challenges and Opportunities

LII Phase 1 highlighted the critical role of strong partnerships, especially with corporate partners bringing in technical expertise, behaviour change innovations, and community training support. Ensuring clearer role definitions and early planning involvement for corporate partners in Phase 2 will enhance alignment and impact.

Community ownership emerged as a key driver of success—villages that led their own planning and implementation progressed faster. Phase 2 must deepen this engagement, promote SHG-led models, and encourage user fee systems for O&M to build sustainability.

In Himachal Pradesh's Solan district, Dargahot and Dabhona GPs needed better arrangements for Solid and Liquid Waste Management and more focus regarding source segregation and safe management of plastic waste.

Supported by ITC and Tata, these tiny GPs constructed underground drains, soak pits and segregated waste storage units, including compost pits. A tractor-trolley-based garbage collection system was implemented with households contributing Rs 80 per month for the services. Additionally, greywater from households was filtered and reused in agriculture. These interventions led to improved hygiene, vector control and high community participation, demonstrating how strategic planning can yield sustainable outcomes.

For Panchin, Chagapan GP in Assam's Karimpur district, Tata Trusts lent its support in developing 131 compost pits, 132 community soak pits and 88 stabilisation ponds. One vehicle for collection and transportation of waste was engaged and its waste segregation shed was developed. Notably, 80% of wet waste is now processed at the household level using compost pits and the resulting compost used in home gardens and livestock shelters, reducing environmental burden and supporting agriculture. This GP now stands not for reviving traditional composting practices alongside new infrastructure. This approach led to robust sanitation improvements, but organic farming linkages and cultural reinforcement of traditional practices.

Persistent challenges in achieving convergence and fund flow, particularly due to delays in integrating Village Action Plans into Green Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs) can be addressed by involving partners in the planning process early on. Cross-learning from urban sanitation models also holds promise. Leveraging technology for monitoring, service delivery and collection of user fees will be vital, as will integrating dedicated O&M support linked to performance metrics. Importantly, Phase 2 prioritises inclusivity, ensuring sanitation access and benefits for all, especially marginalised groups, women, and persons with disabilities.

Towards Sustainable Swachhata

LII Phase 2 is more than a programme—it's a signal that India's rural sanitation journey is not slowing down; it's evolving. By scaling proven practices, investing in people and institutions, and prioritising sustainability, the initiative strengthens the national roadmap towards *Swachhata*—total, inclusive and lasting sanitation in the story of India's sanitation transformation. LII Phase 2 writes the next chapter—one where communities design, communities lead, and every village becomes a beacon of clean, healthy living. □

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IEC & Behaviour Change

From community-led efforts in Swachh Bharat Mission SBM-G Phase I to people-centric messaging under Jal Jeevan Mission and the sustainability focus of SBM-G Phase-II, communication has acted as the invisible infrastructure sustaining the change. India's WASH revolution demonstrates that while infrastructure is essential, lasting change begins with informed and inspired people.

India's transformation in the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector over the past 11 years has been one of the world's most significant public health achievements. Flagship programmes—Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM-G) and Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)—have not only expanded infrastructure but also catalysed a nationwide behavioural shift toward cleanliness and safe water practices. This journey—from open defecation to Open Defecation Free (ODF) villages, and from handpumps and unclean sources to tap water at the household level—is fundamentally a communication success. Infrastructure without behaviour change is like a tap without water or a toilet without use. Recognising this, the Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation (DDWS) embedded communication as a core strategy across all WASH initiatives, guided by the principle of *jan shiksha*—a people's movement.

Communication as the Invisible Infrastructure

At the core of India's WASH gains is a robust and adaptive Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) strategy. From community-led efforts in SBM-G Phase I to people-centric messaging under JJM and the sustainability focus of SBM-G Phase II, communication has acted as the invisible infrastructure sustaining change. The success of these 11 years can be attributed to the 4 Ps—People, Political Leadership, Public Funding, and Partnerships—driven by visionary national leadership and active citizen participation.

Innovative strategies such as Community Approaches to Sanitation (CAS), Interpersonal Communication (IPC), and community mobilisation generated demand and social norms for safe sanitation and hygienic behaviours. Mass media created visibility and aspiration, but the decisive impact came from layered, decentralised communication—national narratives amplified by local relevance and cultural resonance.

From Construction to Behaviour

Launched in 2014, SBM-G Phase I was never just a toilet construction programme; it was the world's largest behaviour change campaign. IEC was at the heart of its design and delivery. Using tools such as Community-led Total Sanitation (CLTS), triggering exercises, and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), communities were mobilised to take collective action. While 360-degree media campaigns ran in parallel, the real strength lay in POC and grassroots mobilisation.

Key elements included:

- **Swachhagrahis**—trained hand-pump motivators who catalysed community engagement and reinforced social norms;
- **360-degree campaigns**—from national drives like *Samwaad Band* to promote use of Individual Household Latrines (IHLs);
- **Swachh Bharat Samitis**—engaging

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young adults in the country's largest behaviour change effort.

- **Celebrity-led messages**—focusing on toilet use, ending open defecation, and awareness of SBM-G components to create aspiration across India.

Equally important were cultural formats that included folk art, street plays, puppet shows, and local dialect messaging—highlighting the health and nutrition impacts of open defecation, programme awareness, and the role of *Gross Acharyas*. Children were positioned as change agents, spreading hygiene messages within families. This layered approach played a pivotal role in enabling the ODF declaration on 02 October 2019.

Behaviour Reinforcement

SBM-G Phase II builds on these gains by focusing on sustaining ODF outcomes and scaling solid and liquid waste management (SLWM). Communication aims to prevent slippage and entrench sanitation as a way of life. National platforms like *Swachh M Desh*, *Swachh Panchayat*, and *Swachh Sarvajan* Grass Root rallies in public discourse.

IBC materials are tailored to guide villages in preparing and implementing SLWM systems through participatory planning, while digital and hybrid outreach has expanded through social media, regional radio, and WhatsApp-based dissemination. Messaging is increasingly gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive to ensure no one is left behind.

Building Ownership for Water

Launched in August 2019, Jal Jeeva Mission (JJM) focuses on providing adequate drinking water to the rural population through *Har Ghar Jal*—functional tap connections in every household. Here too, IBC plays a critical role, not only in generating demand but also in fostering community ownership and service-level awareness.

Core features of JJM's IBC strategy include:

- **Har Ghar Jal**—messaging emphasising health, dignity, and time savings, particularly for women and girls.
- **Community involvement** through Village Water & Sanitation Committees (VWSCs) in planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- A JJM IBC/BCC strategy booklet shared with States/UTs to enable Annual Media Plans and programme alignment at scale.

In capacity States, JJM issued guidelines and advisories on programme logo usage, project information boards to enhance transparency, and the development of brochures, leaflets, and toolkits. Capacity-building workshops, discussions with media houses and radio jockeys, and continuous guidance ensured consistent, high-quality materials.

Campaigns, Media, and Recognition

To popularise programme components, the Department deployed a mix of TV campaigns (including JM animation and programme films featuring a girl child asking about water in her village), print media, radio jingles, outdoor publicity, and posters. Participation in national and international festivals and fairs broadened awareness. In 2020, JJM's Republic Day tableau won the best tableau award under the Central Ministries category—reflecting the programme's public recognition and relevance.

A special focus has been on empowering communities, particularly women, for water quality testing using *FIELD Test* kits (FTKs). Campaigns such as the 100-Day Campaign, *Jal Utsav*, and nationwide digital social media efforts have fostered community pride and healthy competition among villages. Integration of handwashing, safe water handling, and hygiene into school curricula nurtures generational behaviour change. Unlike SBM-G, where the focus was on visible action, JJM's communication emphasises service awareness, source sustainability, and behaviours around water use and source protection.

IBC Innovations

India's WASH revolution has been underpinned by distinct innovations that made behaviour change reliable, aspirational, and repeatable:



- **Dormant Reed/Dormant Reed Debans:** Launched under SRM-G Phase I and strategically relaunched in Phase II, this campaign used a powerful metaphor to end open defecation. Avishai Bachchan served as a widely trusted face. The 'Dormant' phase reinforced consistent toilet use and community monitoring to prevent slippage.
- **Swachh Sakshar Shastriyog:** By promoting clean, well-maintained, and visually appealing toilets—often through colourful wall art—the campaign made sanitation aspirational, strengthened emotional and social pride, and encouraged households to upgrade and maintain facilities. Community competitions and recognition amplified the effect.
- **Swachh Slogo:** A mascot-driven community radio initiative that personified cleanliness and made sanitation messages friendly and memorable, especially for children and youth, turning them into ambassadors of change at home and in the community.
- **Swachhness Ki Sewa (SKS):** Observed annually since 2017 in the run-up to Gandhi Jayanti, SKS mobilises citizens for cleanliness drives and volunteerism. It exemplifies Jan Shiksha by converging initiatives, public institutions, schools, panchayats, and community groups for nationwide outreach and action.
- **101-Day Campaign (Schools and Anganwadis):** During Covid-19, this focused drive ensured functional tap water connections in schools and Anganwadis so that returning children found safe, hygienic environments. Anchored in inter-departmental coordination and intense IEC, it reinforced handwashing, safe water use, and hygiene practices.
- **Jai Jaloni Supported by JIM and conceptualised by NITI Aayog, Jai Jaloni** celebrates water awareness, conservation, equity, community ownership, and source sustainability using vernacular cultural forms—*nahid natias*, wall art, folk music, exhibitions, and school competitions.
- **Atari Ki 75 Kahaniyan:** Curated during Atari ke Amrit Mahotsav, these real-life narratives highlighted WASH change-makers across India. Storytelling made abstract concepts—the behaviour reinforcements and sustainability—relatable and human, inspiring citizens-led progress on digital platforms.



Students as 'Jalooni'

- **Students engaged as change agents, 'Jalooni':** The Jalooni initiative by JIM Assam is another compelling example of community participation and behavioural change. The initiative engaged school students from Classes VIII to XII and trained them to become ambassadors of safe water, sanitation, hygiene, and sustainability. What made Jalooni impactful was its multi-legend approach, leveraging the success of this transformative programme, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) directed all affiliated schools across the country to adopt similar activities and principles.



A river for drinking being demonstrated at rural schools, enabling them to check the quality of water and take steps towards its protection.

Women as Change Agents

The active involvement of rural women has been instrumental in driving behavioural change at the grassroots. With their involvement as Jal Samiti and Jal Sahitya, women have taken on leadership roles in promoting safe water practices, hygiene awareness, and community mobilisation. Their deep community connections, practical knowledge, and influence within households have made them natural advocates of WASH goals, ensuring that the message of cleanliness and water conservation is not only heard but also practised and sustained.

The Triple C

Across all missions, DDWS has adopted a 'Triple C' approach to WASH—Convergence, Capacity Building, and Community Engagement. This means aligning WASH messaging and activities with the National Health Mission (NHM), engaging Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), and training block-level functionaries and volunteers to build a self-sustaining WASH ecosystem at the grassroots. In both missions, digital and hybrid media expanded reach—social media, radio jingles, regional newspapers, and WhatsApp dissemination helped scale timely, localised content.

A defining new effort has been made to position water, sanitation, and hygiene as integral to health security, particularly in the wake of Covid-19. Cleanliness is reframed not just as a civic duty but as a preventive health measure, directly linked to dignity, safety, and public well-being.

Role of Social Media

Social media platforms have emerged as a powerful catalyst in taking the WASH mission to every corner of the country—amplifying messages, engaging diverse audiences, and creating a culture of participation and pride. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp have allowed DDWS to reach the right audience at the right time, breaking the barriers of geography, language, and access.

Through carefully crafted hashtags, on-ground success stories, and community-led initiatives, social media has helped humanise the missions.

Social media has not only expanded the reach of the missions but also fostered emotional resonance, making water and sanitation everyone's business—not through mandates, but through momentum.

Inclusivity and Equity in Messaging

Inclusivity is a cornerstone. Gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive WASH ensures that messages and materials are accessible and relevant to all, including the most marginalised. Under awareness efforts, communities—especially women—have been empowered with skills and training for water quality testing and participatory planning. Children continue to be engaged as change agents through school activities and youth-oriented content, strengthening intergenerational norms for hygiene and safe water practices.

From Awareness to Accountability

As India advances toward universal access to WASH, the role of communication must evolve. The next frontier is to move beyond informing and inspiring to instilling a culture of accountability, sustainability, and responsible consumption. This will include:

- Behaviour nudges that make the right action the easy action;
- Social norms that reinforce community expectations;
- Gamification to make participation engaging and measurable;
- Real-time dashboards that enable transparency, feedback loops, and course correction at the grassroots.

India's WASH revolution demonstrates that while infrastructure is essential, lasting change begins with informed and inspired people. Communication must therefore keep emphasising citizen-level ownership, DSW responsibilities, and local monitoring—as that gains are preserved and improved over time. The 4Ps provided the enabling environment: WASH/ICC supplied the strategy and tools; and citizens—enabled through community approaches, reliable campaigns, cultural formats, and inclusive messaging—turned intent into impact.

As DDWS continues to innovate, adapt, and engineer demand-led, the focus remains clear: make sanitation and safe water a social norm, sustain outcomes through community ownership, and build resilience through convergence and capacity. With communication as the invisible infrastructure, India's journey from UDF to GOF-sustained villages and from scarce sources to *Har Ghar Jal* will keep moving forward—rooted in participation, reinforced by behaviour, and secured by sustainability. □



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The village, established in 1996 in Dimapur Block (Chamekhedra District) with 42 households (303 residents), struggled each dry season as its scattered springs dried up, forcing women and children to walk 3-5 km downhill for water. Under JIM, the Village Council and VWSC, collaborated with Nagaland's Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), villagers mapped springs, designed gravity-fed pipelines, storage tanks and household taps, and provided collective labor, while drafting local guidelines to protect water sources. Customary forest conservation rules endorsed by Village Development Boards, together with ISA and WSSC-led training in rainwater-harvesting pits and catchers safeguarding, have established a functional, community-owned water supply system. [U](#)



Water storage tank in Shikuto

Kamdevbati, West Bengal



Netaji Ghosh addressing women group members

Priya Ghosh, the head of the VWSC in Murshidabad's Sahelpur Panchayat, ran awareness campaigns on fire and disease risks to promote safe use of piped drinking water; her leadership led to full household tap coverage in the village. VWSC now promotes water conservation, oversees soak pit construction, and performs water testing. With support from the 15th Finance Commission, infrastructure improvements were made, while women and childrens realized time once spent fetching water to pursue education and livelihoods. [U](#)

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BELIEF IN THE BALLOT

(VOLUME-2)

Human Stories Shaping India's 2024 Elections

Published by: Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting

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INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF DEMOCRACY
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The 2024 Indian General Elections marked a monumental chapter in the world's largest democracy, with more than 64 crore voters participating, including a record of more than 31 crore women voters' participation. This book delves into the heart of India's general election, capturing not just the scale and magnitude of the voting process, but the deep human narratives that breathe life into it.

Through inspiring tales of hope, perseverance, and resilience, India 2024 illustrates the human spirit at the center of this grand democratic exercise. From the resilient women braving odious travels to cast their votes, to the elderly navigating innovative home voting systems, these narratives showcase the courage and determination of individuals across diverse landscapes. Discover through this book, how ordinary citizens become catalysts for change, shaping the future of their country under challenges and triumphs. **Q**

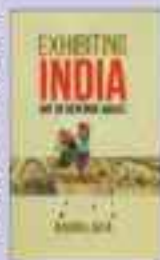


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Author : Nandini Jais, Price: Rs 550/-, Language: English

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