

Peoples' Declaration on World Toilet Day

19 November 2013



India claims to be a fast growing economy but the situation of the marginalized and excluded communities in the country remains to be difficult and deplorable as they struggle to sustain their lives. Among others, one of the most important challenges in India still remains to be the crisis of Sanitation as it carries the burden of being the open defecation capital in the world. There is enough evidence that improved & adequate sanitation is strongly linked to economic growth, dignified lives, better health, reduce preventable deaths especially among under five children and improve their nutritional status. It is also widely recognized that improved sanitation and hygiene contributes significantly to gender equality, school attendance, livelihood and safeguarding the environment.

There have been efforts by the government since mid-80's to address the issue of sanitation and Indian government has designed and implemented various programs and schemes to achieve progress on sanitation. However, towards the beginning of 2000/2002, these efforts had concentrated mostly on building toilets and large funds were invested to increase people's access to toilets in rural and urban areas. Demand driven approach was adapted to ensure that people will participate in solving the sanitation crisis. Over the past 10 years, Government of India has also committed Right to Sanitation (SACOSAN III, IV & V) and ensuring a clean living environment for its people.

While the efforts of Government to address the sanitation challenges need to be appreciated, it is quite important to note the concerns and issues emerging from the implementation of sanitation programmes. One such serious concern is the whole issue of the huge number of missing toilets. There are about 3,75,76,324 toilets missing from the ground in rural India and in urban spaces, hundreds of community toilet complexes (CTCs) are not built or are dysfunctional. Many of these CTCs are the breeding places for crimes and violence on women and men. Apart from this, there is total neglect of sludge management of human excreta and more often we witness those being dumped on open fields and drains, particularly affecting the lives of people living in the low income settlements.

The Right to Sanitation Campaign in India has been raising the issues of missing toilets, dysfunctional toilet units, improper and inadequate fecal management system and inappropriate implementing mechanism of sanitation development programmes.

The Campaign articulates Sanitation as:

- A process of regeneration of the environment to be fit for human habitation Disposal and management of human waste (excreta) ensuring that no human being comes into contact with human excreta, ensuring health and environmental safety
- Includes infrastructure and resources for all, everywhere, at all times
- Sensitive to specific needs of different sections of society and their life cycles. Sensitive means inclusive and sensitive design, availability of required water and personal hygiene inclusive of MHM, feasible technologies, gender, age and cross-disability friendly
- Removes stigma and is culturally accepted

With this understanding and on the occasion of World Toilet Day 2013, a day that the UN has also now recognized as World Toilet Day, the Right to Sanitation Campaign calls upon the government of India to:

- Acknowledge that there has been a serious misappropriation of public money in the name of constructing toilets
- Provide a white paper on 'Missing Toilets' / 'Dead Toilets' in the country
- Take punitive measures for the misuse of public funds
- Ensure people and environment -centred and context (socio-cultural and climatic contexts) specific sanitation solutions
- Institute effective implementation and credible monitoring mechanism

Further, on this occasion, the Campaign is reiterating its earlier appeals made at SACOSAN V and urge the Government of India to:

- Recognise sanitation as a legally enforceable right fundamental for human health, dignity, empowerment, environment and development as committed in SACOSAN III & IV and resolved to be fulfilled by the United Nations General Assembly
- Fulfil existing national and international commitments for ensuring universal access to sanitation including all households, schools, health centres, work places, public buildings and public spaces/places at all times and in all situations including disasters, emergencies, conflicts and migration
- Spend 1% National Budget to achieve universal access to sanitation and an adequate proportion of this on operation and maintenance of existing infrastructure. To enable monitoring of this budget allocation and utilization, include a separate budget line for sanitation within national budgets
- Ensure inclusive and participatory planning and governance and improved standards of sanitation programs for the entire population with a special emphasis on women, persons with disabilities, children & older people in both rural and urban areas, including slums
- Institutionalize concrete steps to uphold human rights and dignity by eliminating the stigma of impurity and pollution ascribed to sanitation, especially to menstruation and to those providing sanitation services, and ensure that services are provided in the most unbiased and non-discriminatory manner
- Eliminate all forms of manual scavenging and ensure dignity and equality for the sanitation workforce. Ensure that disposal and management of human waste is carried out in strict conformity to the principles of protecting human rights, health and environmental sustainability.
- Position right to sanitation & hygiene for all at all times in the development of the post-2015 framework and SAARC agenda and advocate for a separate target for 'universal access to sanitation'

Declaration made by: **Right to Sanitation Campaign in India**

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