



General Studies-2; Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes

Improving Sanitation and Hygiene

Introduction

- The Covid-19 pandemic was declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organisation (WHO).
- Since then, various national and international organisations have been emphasizing on maintaining personal hygiene and sanitation.

Need of Sanitation system

- Sustainable sanitation, alongside clean water and handwashing facilities are necessary to help protect and maintain our health security and stop the spread of deadly infectious diseases such as COVID-19, cholera, and typhoid.
- Wastewater and sludge from toilets contain valuable water, nutrients, and energy.
- Sustainable sanitation systems make productive use of waste to safely boost agriculture and reduce and capture emissions for greener energy.
- Thus, Toilets can help us to fight climate change too!
- For privacy for women and women security issues.
- Girls drop out in rural due to lack of toilets and health issues during menstruation.
- Down to Earth reported 210 million people lack access to improved basic sanitation in India.

Concerns / Challenges

- The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has flagged irregularities in the construction of toilets in schools by Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs).

- The objective of providing separate toilets for boys and girls was not fulfilled in 27% of the schools.
- 75% of toilets did not follow the norm for daily cleaning at least once a day.
- Almost 40% of toilets were non-existent, partially completed or unused.
- Construction of toilets is considered still a taboo in some sections of society.
- Lack of dedicated funds, poor maintenance, poor water availability are some of the challenges.

Government Initiatives

- Through SBM, India received a new thrust, with focus shifting from sewerage networks to sanitation, putting in place a time-bound plan to improve access to toilets across the country.
- Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (DDWS) under the Ministry of Jal Shakti has launched the 10-year Rural Sanitation Strategy starting from 2019 up to 2029.
- It lays down a framework to guide local governments, policy-makers, implementers and other relevant stakeholders in their planning for Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus status.
- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) launched various initiatives to make SBM-U a successful project.
- Star rating protocol for Garbage free cities: It is based on 12 parameters which follow a SMART framework – Single metric, Measurable, Achievable, Rigorous verification mechanism and Targeted towards outcomes.
- Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs): MoHUA has also partnered with National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to use the plastic waste for road construction.
- Additionally, cities have been asked to set up adequate Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) to handle the segregation, processing and recycle of plastic waste.
- MoHUA launched the Swachh Survekshan 2020 (SS 2020) league, a quarterly cleanliness assessment of cities and towns in India.
- Mechanising cleaning of sewers and drains under prohibition of employment as manual scavengers act, 2013 provides dignified life to manual scavengers.

Way forward

- The massive hygiene awareness and behavior change that accompanied covid-19 must be sustained.
- There are several innovative and sustainable 'Made in India' models to serve the bottom of pyramid in this regard, and rapid scaling of these is urgently warranted.
- Accelerate adoption of decentralized and circular economy models for waste & waste water treatment.
- Set up a national infection control task force that will help respond swiftly with knowledge & insights, and shape national, state, district and community level responses, to ensure that new epidemics are contained quickly and effectively.
- With its talent, start-up ecosystem, digital prowess and science & technology leadership, India has a unique health-cum-economic opportunity to emerge as a pioneer in tackling future pandemic threats.
- Water and sanitation must be considered a public good and its basic universal access must be ensured by the state.
- Universal access to water and sanitation is an imperative step on the way forward to collective health and recovery.