
India



Bangladesh betters India in sanitation: UNDP

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India may be notches ahead of Bangladesh as a global success story but in the field of sanitation the neighbour is much ahead, thanks in large measure to its effective low-cost toilets, says a new UN report released Thursday.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, Bangladesh's low-cost toilet revolution and awareness programmes about hygiene have made the country a role model in the field of sanitation.

While Bangladesh has 39 percent area covered under sustainable improved sanitation, in India the figure is 33 percent - according to 2004 figures. Since then, Bangladesh has improved vastly upon its sanitation.

Seeing its neighbour's rapid improvement in sanitation, India has put the much-ignored subject at a focus in the budget and is trying to replicate the situation in the country too.

According to the report, over the last 10 years while India has made more rapid economic progress, widening the gap between the two countries, 'in rural sanitation India has fallen behind Bangladesh even though some Indian states have made progress'.

'Two-thirds of Indians don't have access to improved sanitation. It is not just a question of health but also human dignity, particularly of women,' said Arunabha Ghosh, one of the authors, at the release of the report here by UNDP Representative Maxime Olson and Union Water Resources Minister Saifuddin Soz.

The scenario on the drinking water front was a little better, with around 86 percent Indians having access to improved water within one kilometre of their households.

It is however another matter that the quality of water has been deteriorating with the drop in the water table due to over exploitation of underground resources, said Ghosh.

'The quality of water available is closely linked to sanitation,' said Ghosh.

The report points out that the rich countries, including the US and Britain, have gone through the problem of high death rates due to poor sanitation in cities like London before reversing the trend through major remedial action.

It is estimated that in South Asia a sum of around \$36 billion is lost due to productivity cost or health

cost as a result of poor water quality and sanitation. In India, water-related problems result in around 450,000 diarrhoeal deaths annually - more than in any other country.

'Pakistan ranks 28 places higher in the global league table for deaths from diarrhoea than in GDP per capita and India ranks 14 places higher. Of course many factors are at play, but low levels of spending on water and sanitation surely contribute,' the report states.

Advocating user charges to check wastage of water on the lines adopted in several countries including in some Indian cities like Bangalore, Ghosh stressed that examples of community led projects to improve sanitation, as in Bangladesh or Pune slums, could be a way forward.

In the case of Bangladesh, Ghosh stated that success was achieved through a three-pronged strategy - of making people feel disgust at the filth they are generating, creating awareness of health issues and getting people to support the drive for installing toilets in every home and improving sanitation infrastructure to ensure the water source is not polluted.

In India it is not only in small cities, town and rural areas that much needs to be done to improve sanitation, but even in metropolitan cities.

'In some cities, coverage rates are high but sewerage systems are in extreme disrepair. Delhi has many of the trappings of a developed country sanitation model but appearances belie some serious problems,' the report warns.

The annual UNDP's Human Development Report 2006 this year focuses on 'Beyond scarcity: power, poverty and the global water crisis' taking a critical look at a major factor in progress toward Millennium Development Goals.

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