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## Towards Clean and Healthy Villages

*Narendra Singh Tomar*

**O**ur country lives in her villages and only when the villages are developed the holistic and inclusive development of the country is possible. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister, the Government is committed to all round development of rural areas. But this dream of development would remain unfulfilled without making rural India clean. The government is making all out efforts to bring about large scale development in the villages and cleanliness is the most important component of this effort. If the villages are not clean then the development of the villages will remain incomplete. Many innovative efforts are being made which have transformed or are in the process of transforming the lives of the crores of people living in rural areas. An initiative that has made marked

contribution in changing the quality of life of rural people is the Swachh Bharat Mission.

The objective of Swachh Bharat Mission, launched by Minister on October 2, 2014, is to make human life cleaner, healthier and dignified. Cleanliness is not only a life-force but also the cornerstone of human development. No community and society can be successful till it is clean. The goals related to education, health, poverty alleviation, human development etc. cannot be achieved in the absence of cleanliness.

Cleanliness also contributes significantly in the economic development of the nation. The Prime Minister had given a clarion call for building Clean India in his first Independence Day address from the ramparts of Red Fort. He accorded

national priority to cleanliness. While launching Swachh Bharat in New Delhi, the Prime Minister had said that it is our social obligation as the citizens of India to fulfil Gandhiji's vision of Clean India in the year 2019 on the occasion of his 150th birth anniversary. Today the whole nation is in unison with that call. The people of different sections of the society have promoted this peoples' movement of cleanliness and it still continues in full zest. Every day, crores of Indians are joining the India clean-up initiative. Today 22 states, 468 districts and more than 4 lakh 68 thousand villages in the country have become open defecation free (ODF). Since October 2, 2014, more than 8.59 lakh individual household toilets have been constructed. On October 2, 2014, the sanitation coverage was 38.70 percent and currently it is 93.90 percent. Such a huge progress has not

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been seen anywhere in the world in the field of hygiene and cleanliness. This great effort of India has presented a unique example before the world about how the nation can be enthused and inspired on the issue of social concern. Today, inspired from this program of India, many countries of the world are planning on this pattern to improve their sanitation conditions.

#### **Transforming the Destiny of our Villages**

Swachh Bharat has transformed the face and destiny of the village today. Studies have revealed that in every house of an Open Defecation Free village, about Rs. 50000 are being saved because the family is saving on the expenditure otherwise being incurred on treatment of various diseases. The rural families are utilizing this savings to acquire new amenities and facilities, to provide better education to the children, and to improve their standard of living. People's health related expenses have come down and they are able to work for more days. According to a study by the World Health Organization, with the implementation of Swachh Bharat Mission, every year we have successfully prevented a large number of children from becoming victims of deadly diseases in rural areas and the situation is continuously improving.

#### **Unique Initiatives**

Swachh Bharat has also led to certain unique initiatives in rural areas that have never been seen before. Women associated with Self Help

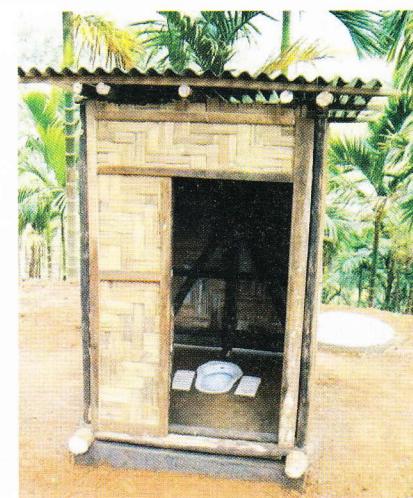
Groups have made commendable contribution in the cleanliness movement. They have invested their savings in cleanliness related works and thus played an important role in making the environment and surroundings beautiful and clean. Women members of Self Help Groups have extended financial help to many families who were trapped in the financial crisis. Self Help Groups have also helped in strengthening social harmony through many efforts of mutual cooperation. Our Panchayat representatives have also shown commendable interest in Swachh Bharat Mission. They drew up effective schemes to make their Panchayats ODF, implemented them enthusiastically and efficiently and made significant contribution to their sustenance. The Panchayats have made sincere efforts to not only connect the masses with this program and with the cooperation of all made the village panchayats ODF, but they have also promoted environment related cleanliness by undertaking activities related to solid and liquid waste management.

Swachh Bharat Mission has now acquired the form of a mass movement and with the aim to take it forward, the Rural Development Ministry has taken a number of measures through its ambitious scheme Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act- MGNREGA. This includes awareness promotion among the village panchayats towards cleanliness in the rural areas and encouraging and training villagers to take up activities related to livelihood creation .The

Ministry is engaged in construction of individual household toilets and soakage pits, solid waste management (Vermi / NADEP compost pits), works related to solid and liquid waste management (drainage channel, liquid bio-compost, recharge pits, toilets in schools and Aanganwadis, soakage channels, village drains, construction of water stabilization ponds and water conservation works to make used grey water (dirty water) useful. It is being emphasized that every village Panchayat becomes a clean Panchayat.

#### **Managing Waste Water**

Management of the waste water is a big challenge for the whole world today. Whether it is rural area or urban, the lack of planning and infrastructure for waste water management leads to unclean life situations. It causes spread of diseases and infections. In this connection, we are happy to inform that for waste water management in Telangana state soakage pits are being constructed through MGNREGA at family and community level. In the same way, in Nanded district of Maharashtra MGNREGA funds were utilized for making soakage pits which has helped to get rid of mosquitoes in the villages. The scheme was implemented in about 30 villages. Together they ensured that by constructing soakage pits, breeding of mosquitoes would be controlled so that the people of the villages sleep peacefully and protected from diseases caused by mosquitoes. Construction of



Lingpui water tank of Tlenguam R G Block in Aizawl district of Mizoram was started as an innovative experiment under MGNREGA. This water tank is built in the shape of an airplane along the road leading to the airport in Aizawl district. There are also public taps in the tank premises which provide safe drinking water. Toilets have been constructed in tank premises which can be used on payment basis. With these facilities and arrangements in place, this tank has become a multipurpose asset. It is also earning income for Gram Panchayat.

Haryana Government has developed a five pond system in rural areas for stabilization of waste water under MGNREGA. The main objective is to ensure proper disposal of waste water in rural areas and to clean the environment of the village by ensuring better living conditions. Ariad Gram Panchayat in Matilakam block of Thrissur district of Kerala has started a project to produce construction material. The cement-concrete blocks fabricated under this project were used for MGNREGA works like construction of individual household toilets. Under MGNREGA scheme vermicomposting units are also being constructed.

### **Individual Sanitation**

Substantial amount of MGNREGA funds are being spent on the activities related to rural cleanliness and the results have come out as anticipated. During the financial year 2014-15, Rs. 92435 lakhs have been spent on the construction of individual household toilets through this scheme. During the last financial year, the expenditure was more than Rs. 13, 935 lakhs. On the construction of Soakage pits, the expenditure was more than Rs. 15598 lakhs during the last financial year as compared to Rs. 2938 lakhs for the financial year 2014-15. During the financial year 2014-15 Rs. 1676 lakh rupees were spent on solid waste management by way of constructing vermi/NADEP compost pits while more than Rs. 54853 lakh were spent last year on these works. During the financial year 2014-15, Rs. 49512



lakh were spent on solid and liquid waste management works like drainage channels, liquid bio fertilizer, recharge pits, school and aanganwadi toilets, soakage channels, village drains and stabilization ponds. As compared to this, in financial year 2017-18 more than Rs. 85221 lakh were spent on these works. About Rs. 471230 lakh were spent on water conservation works in financial year 2014-15. However, as compared to this amount Rs. 692216 lakh were spent in financial year 2017-18. In all works related to cleanliness Rs. 617792 lakh were spent in financial year 2014-15, Rs. 698357 lakh in 2015-16 and Rs. 987822 lakh in 2017-18. During the current financial year also about Rs. 593070 lakh have been spent till now on all works related to cleanliness. This way a substantial amount of MGNREGA funds have been spent or are being spent in activities related to overall cleanliness of rural areas.

### **Physical Achievements**

If we look at the physical achievements in the area of rural cleanliness through MGNREGA we find that during the financial year 2014-15, 13.88 lakh individual household toilets have been constructed using MGNREGA fund. About 7 lakh toilets

have been constructed during the financial year 2015-16, about 7.5 lakh toilets in financial year 2016-17 and about 9 lakh toilets in financial year 2017-18 by using MGNREGA funds. In the financial year 2016-17, rapid construction of soakage pits was witnessed. As compared to construction of 37000 soakage pits in financial year 2015-16, the number has markedly increased to 421553 in financial year 2016-17. In the financial year 2017-18 also more than 219000 soakage pits were constructed. Solid waste management through constructing vermi/NADEP compost pits has also shown significant progress. Works related to this has increased from 5000 in 2014-15 to 182000 in 2016-17 and 254000 in 2017-18. Solid and liquid waste management through works like drainage channels, liquid bio fertilizer, recharge pits, school and aanganwadi toilets, soakage channels, village drains and stabilization ponds has also shown significant progress. In the financial year 2015-16, 82564 such works were completed. The number of such works increased to 382725 in financial year 2016-17. During the financial year 2017-18, also more than 183000 such works have been completed. MGNREGA funds are being utilized efficiently in water conservation works

which have also shown good progress. Under infrastructure development related to water conservation about 276000 works were completed during the financial year 2014-15, 277000 in the financial year 2015-16, 600000 in the financial year 2016-17 and about 384000 in the financial year 2017-18.

#### Meeting Challenges

All these facts and data clearly indicate that the government is focussed on the development of rural areas and making the villages clean in every respect. For the development of the villages, country's lifeline, in true sense Ministry of Rural Development is making concerted efforts to ensure overall cleanliness in the rural areas. This is an aspect which cannot be ignored. MGNREGA, the country's most ambitious scheme being implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development, has understood its importance and thousands of its success stories have proved that the citizens of our country have become aware of the importance of cleanliness in the village and they are resolving to make rural India clean and maintain cleanliness in the villages.

The village panchayats are not only focusing on cleanliness through individual household toilets now but also taking steps to clear waste through vermicomposting pits. Panchayats are playing a critical role in the maintenance of clean environment by taking up activities like drainage channels, liquid bio fertilizer, recharge pits, school and aanganwadi toilets, soakage channels, village drains and stabilization ponds under the implementation of MGNREGA. However, considering the diversity of the villages in the country it should be kept in mind that no one model of sanitation can be adopted for all 238617 Gram Panchayats in India. Yes, we have to focus on developing such measures which are easy to adopt, economical and have minimum technical limitations. MGNREGA's revolutionary initiative to make rural India clean and its effective implementation by the present government has started to show constructive results.

In fact, this innovative initiative of the Rural Development Ministry is improving ecological balance and helping immensely in taking the country's rural population towards a clean and healthy environment. Our Prime Minister has launched the 'Swachhata Hi Sewa' programme from September 15, 2018 to October 2, 2018. The enthusiasm of people participating in this program is very commendable. In this regard, I would like to request to all the dear villagers of our country that they do not limit it to October only and make it an integral part of their daily life, make it a habit and work on regular basis to clean their villages, streets, environment and surroundings, thereby contributing to the prosperity of rural life. Indeed, this will be their unique contribution to building of a new India. □

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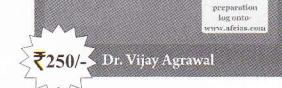
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