
Urban population and WatSan

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 - National Sample survey organization survey in 2002 found that only 84 % of the notified slums are having access to water supply through tap water supply
 - Nearly 44 % of non-notified slums do not have a drainage system of any type
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India is urbanising very fast and along with this, the slum population is also increasing. India's urban population is increasing at a faster rate than its total population. With over 575 million people, India will have 41 % of its population living in cities and towns by 2030 from the present level of 286 million and 28%. However, most of them do not have access to basic facilities like drinking water and sanitation.

Among the urban poor, the slum dwellers are the poorest. The very definition of slums points at the acute drinking water and sanitation crisis for the slum dwellers. A slum in India is defined as 'a cluster inside urban areas without having water and sanitation access'.

The National Sample Survey Organisation survey conducted in 2002 found that in 84% of the notified slums the main water source is through tap water supply. But these numbers mask differences across the states of India. In Bihar none of the slums get water via the tap. In Chhattisgarh, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh less than 35% of slums get tap water. Nearly 44% of non-notified slums do not have a drainage system of any type whereas only 15% of notified slums do not have a drainage system.

A similar picture emerges in the case of latrines. Nearly half of the non-notified slums do not have a latrine of any type. In contrast only 17% of notified slums do not have a latrine. However, the past few years have seen significant improvements in water and sanitation situation in slums. But, that is not a source of solace as there is still a vast number of slum dweller to be provided these basic facilities.

India's slum population has doubled

The slum population is constantly increasing: it has doubled in the past two decades. The current population living in slums in the country is more than the population of Britain. India's slum-dwelling population rose from 27.9 million in 1981 to over 40 million in 2001.

As per the 2001 census of India, 640 towns spread over 26 states and union territories have reported existence of slums. This means one out of every four persons reside in slums in our cities and towns. The NSSO survey in 2002 has identified 51,688 slums in urban areas of which 50.6% of urban slums have been declared as "notified slums."

This growing slum population and the lack of basic facilities will badly impact on India's overall target achievement in water and sanitation sector.

A puzzle

What puzzles everybody is despite sharp reductions in poverty and rising incomes, slum population is increasing. And it is a truism that slum dwellers are poor. GoI has been initiating targeted schemes and programmes to improve slum conditions since 1960s. But its policy focus has undergone a change over a period of time.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Indian government had a policy of 'no slums cities'. This warranted forceful resettlement and rehabilitation of slum dwellers. However, this didn't help in making cities slums-free. Then the Government started implementing slum upgrade programmes under which infrastructure development was encouraged.

Since 1972 the Government of India initiated a programme called Environmental Improvement of Urban Slums under which priority to drinking water and sanitation was given. Again in 1996 government initiated the National Slum Development Programme with substantial fund allocation. It had a specified focus on providing drinking water and community toilets. After spending close to Rs3,100 crore in nine years, it was discontinued. It was estimated that 46 million slum dwellers benefited from it.

In 2005 government started the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), an initiative to encourage reforms and fast-track planned development of certain cities. It has a financial commitment of Rs1,50,000 crore during 2006-12. The larger objective of the mission is to integrated development of infrastructure services; accelerating the flow of investment into urban infrastructure services; planned development of cities including the peri-urban areas and universalisation of urban services to ensure their availability to the urban poor.

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