

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 2719
TO BE ANSWERED ON 18.12.2024

WOMEN AND CHILD WELFARE

2719. SHRI R. GIRIRAJAN:

Will the Minister of Women and Child Development be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is aware of the fact that lack of proper sanitation facilities, hygienic and safe toilets and clean water is affecting badly the women health and also their self esteem, dignity and safety and making it difficult to participate in the workforce and contribute to the economic development of the country, if so, the details thereof; and
- (b) the steps taken by the Ministry to mitigate the problems faced by the working women, girl students in this regard?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT
(SHRIMATI SAVITRI THAKUR)

(a): The Government has taken cognizance of the fact that access to sanitation is a matter of fundamental dignity and safety for women and girls. Open defecation has persisted as a common challenge across the globe for centuries, including in India. Lack of access to household toilets increases the vulnerability of women and girls to sexual violence, particularly in odd hours or night.

Moreover, the high and recurring costs of sanitary napkins, may deter women, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, from changing pads in a timely manner, thus adversely affecting their menstrual health and hygiene.

Further, at the household level, mostly the women bear the care burden, integral part of which is ensuring availability of safe water and sanitation management. Due to the traditional patriarchal nature of many communities, cleaning of toilets is looked upon as an “unclean” job, often done by the women of the household, or outsourced to a domestic worker; most of them are women.

The Government is also cognizant of the fact that disproportionate burden of care and the drudgery leaves little or no time for women to indulge in productive activities and contribute to the economic development of the family and nation.

(b): Recognizing the above social norms, and inequitable financial implications for women, the Government of India has taken several steps to address the challenges faced by them. The flagship programme Swachh Bharat Mission has brought a paradigm shift in these gendered social norms through attitudinal change. Through a saturation approach, access to safe sanitation through the construction of 11.64 crore household toilets, access to tap water connections for 15.13 crore rural households, and provision of clean cooking gas connections to over 10.3 crore women, the Government of India is ensuring that access to safe water and sanitation does not become a barrier for women’s mobility and development. This has eliminated potential threats to women’s health and safety, and reduced their time poverty and care burden, which they can utilise for engaging in productive economic activities.

Further, the construction of community and public toilets has also helped in addressing and mitigating the health impacts of marginalized groups, such as sanitation workers, ragpickers, informal sector workers, street vendors and others navigating urban areas. Notability, among these marginalised sections, women are often likely to withhold the nature’s call for long periods, leading to build up of toxins and potential health implications like UTIs and others. Further, the absence of clean and functional toilets also exposed women to toxic wastes in unsafe public spaces. These concerns are addressed through the construction of functional toilets.

Under the Swachh Vidyalaya Mission, it was ensured that all schools have at least one functional toilet for girls. As per UDISE+2021-22, 97.48% Government Schools have the facilities of separate Girls’ toilets and 98.2% Government Schools have the facilities of drinking water.

Further, advisory has been issued to all States/ UTs to utilize funds earmarked for Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and management of menstrual waste under Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) Phase-II, 15th Finance Commission, at village level, for installation or maintenance of incinerators in schools having girls from classes VI to XII and for creating awareness on MHM among adolescent girls and in the society in general.

Taking cognizance of what is often referred to as the “pink tax”, the Government of India has made sanitary napkins 100% tax exempt to make it affordable and easily accessible. The price of Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Sanitary Napkins sold through government sponsored Jan Aushadhi Kendras is extremely affordable at Rupee 1 per pad. Provision of 62 crore affordable and quality sanitary napkins sold through the Jan Aushadhi Kendras, as well as schemes encouraging menstrual hygiene management in young adolescent girls such as “Scheme for Promotion of Menstrual Hygiene”, have also contributed towards behavioural changes resulting in increased enrolment of girls in educational institutions.

The Government is committed to providing safe, secure and affordable hostel facility with clean and functional toilets for working women and women aspiring to join the work force, through the Sakhi Niwas (Working women hostels) component of the ‘Samarthya’ sub-scheme of umbrella Shakti Mission for safety, security and empowerment of women, named “Mission Shakti” implemented by Ministry of Women and Child Development. Further, government has also earmarked Rs. 5000 crore for assistance to states for establishment of new Working Women’s Hostel under the “Scheme for Assistance to States for Capital Investment” (SASCI).
