



BLOGS

# Opinion: Individual Household Toilets Are Essential In Reducing Exposure To Covid And Gender Based Violence

For the urban poor in India, a section that depends upon shared toilets, the risk of contracting Covid is much higher, say experts



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Women and girls using shared toilets remain under constant exposure to harassment while accessing these facilities, say experts

The significance of the old, proven adage about prevention being better than cure has been firmly reinforced during the [COVID-19](#) pandemic. People collectively around the nation took precautions like wearing masks, maintaining distance, and avoiding public places to protect themselves. There remains, however, a large section of people for whom some of these precautions aren't a choice. For the urban poor in India, a section that depends upon shared toilets, the risk of contracting the disease is much higher – as many studies have since demonstrated. A feature by Observer Research Foundation,<sup>1</sup> noted that in Mumbai “presence of overused and poorly maintained mega community toilets are seen to be the ‘major reason’ for the explosion of Covid-19 cases in the city”. Already burdened with the loss of employment and lack of access to healthcare facilities, people living in urban slums are further left with meagre resources to sustain through prolonged stress caused by communicable diseases. Women and girls using shared toilets remain under constant exposure to harassment while accessing these facilities. Being burdened with care economy roles and other needs of managing their menstrual hygiene, they suffer more inequality. These inequalities were further aggravated during COVID when access to shared facilities added further jeopardy in terms of the transmissibility of infections.

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In this scenario, Individual Household Toilets (IHHTs) are instrumental in addressing the overall health & wellbeing of the communities. Having a toilet at home can address privacy and safety concerns for women and adolescent girls and fulfil their needs for menstrual hygiene management. For the elderly, people with disabilities, and transgender persons a household toilet can be a remedy. Even as awareness and incentive-based approach has

- Other infrastructural issues such as lack of water supply, inability to get a sewerage connection, especially in compact settlements of cities
- Behavioural issues like the preference of community toilets facilities, lack of perceived need and hesitation among community members to build a toilet inside the house

Several experiences from different cities have suggested possibilities and ways to address these constraints. Appropriate measures are adopted intently by community members and government stakeholders in providing adaptive reuse of space in small dwellings, possibilities of group facilities, access to sanitation credit through self-help groups and providing sewerage access in urban slums. For instance, Pune Municipal Corporation in partnership with Shelter Associates (SA) has constructed 3186 IHHTs through their One Home One Toilet (OHOT) program. Under this model, SA covers the cost of materials required to construct the toilets, members of the community cover the labour cost and the materials are delivered to their doorsteps to help quicken the process of construction. The constant emphasis laid on the construction of these toilets, especially from point of view of the safety of women and girls, encourages community members to take a step in this direction.

Similarly, to address the constraint of adequate space for the construction of toilets, some cities like Wai, Mahad, Sinnar, Vadagaon and Vita in Maharashtra have introduced the idea of Group Toilets, wherein joint families or two to three households share a toilet. Group toilets, even though not completely used by a single household, exponentially limit the access to a large number of people, facilitate the maintenance of hygiene and reduce multiple risks associated with community and public toilets.

**Also Read:** [Five Diseases India Can Stamp Out By Focusing On Handwashing](#)

Sanitation credit through banks and micro-finance institutions(MFIs) through self-help groups has also helped women and other groups belonging to vulnerable communities to construct individual household toilets. Living in a small house of only 12 square meters did not stop Suman from constructing a toilet cum bathroom in her one-room house in Jalna, Maharashtra. Suman is a member of a Self Help Group (SHG) through which she was able to borrow Rs. 11,000 from a private bank and Rs. 5500 as an internal SHG loan for her toilet. Sanitation loans were mobilized for over 300 women by linking SHGs to scheduled commercial banks in Jalna.

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showcasing the role of communities, especially the critical role played by women and local government in constructing individual household toilets in the most vulnerable areas across the country, Centre for Water and Sanitation at CRDF, CEPT University, along with partners from the National Faecal Sludge and Septage Management Alliance (NFSSM Alliance), has developed a [compendium of cases](#) to showcase how these perceived barriers to constructing IIHTs have been successfully addressed.

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 and its target 6.2 for 2030 emphasizes access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, ending open defecation, and paying special attention to the needs of women and girls, and those in vulnerable situations. Given the inter-connectedness of social issues, the multi-fold impact of access to safe sanitation can be evidenced by improvement in public health indicators, improved access to education and livelihood opportunities for women and girls, and security for marginalized persons and groups. There cannot be sanitation for all insofar as the price for accessing a toilet is a person's health and safety. This makes individual household toilets significant in addressing the multitude of issues that are compounded by improper maintenance of community toilets and therefore their construction requires a sustained impetus.

**Also Read:** [WASH Warrior: Thanks To NGO Himmatan, 1,000 Villages In Uttarakhand Have Clean Drinking Water And Sanitation Facilities](#)

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**Disclaimer: These are the personal opinions of the author.**

*NDTV – Dettol* have been working towards a clean and healthy India since 2014 via *Banega Swachh India initiative, which is helmed by Campaign Ambassador Amitabh Bachchan. The campaign aims to highlight* the inter-dependency of humans and the environment, and of humans on one another with the focus on One Health, One Planet, One Future – Leaving No One Behind. It stresses on the need to take care of, and consider,

([Water](#), [Sanitation](#) and [Hygiene](#)) is reaffirmed as handwashing is one of the ways to prevent Coronavirus infection and other diseases. The campaign will continue to raise awareness on the same along with focussing on the importance of nutrition and healthcare for women and children, fight [malnutrition](#), mental wellbeing, self care, science and health, [adolescent health & gender awareness](#). Along with the health of people, the campaign has realised the need to also take care of the health of the eco-system. Our environment is fragile due to human activity, that is not only over-exploiting available resources, but also generating immense pollution as a result of using and extracting those resources. The imbalance has also led to immense biodiversity loss that has caused one of the biggest threats to human survival – climate change. It has now been described as a “[code red for humanity](#).” The campaign will continue to cover issues like [air pollution](#), [waste management](#), [plastic ban](#), [manual scavenging](#) and sanitation workers and [menstrual hygiene](#). Banega Swasth India will also be taking forward the dream of Swasth Bharat, the campaign feels that only a Swachh or clean India where [toilets](#) are used and [open defecation free \(ODF\)](#) status achieved as part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan launched by [Prime Minister Narendra Modi](#) in 2014, can eradicate diseases like diahorrea and the country can become a Swasth or healthy India.

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