

Sustainable Development Goals in Golaghat District and Adjoining Villages of Assam: Implementation and Challenges

Salomy George is the Principal of St. Paul's High School, Thorrur, Telengana. She holds M.sc in Zoology, B.Ed in Natural Science, Diploma in Psychology and Counselling.

Leander Toppo is currently heading an NGO named Parivartan in Golaghat District of Assam. He was actively engaged in a national campaign called 'Don't Break Promise Campaign' in Delhi which monitors the policies and programmes of the Indian Government.

Abstract

Despite the positive achievements of MDGs to eradicate poverty and hunger from the world, the larger issues of development included in the Millennium Declaration, such as, human rights, equity, democracy and governance need to be addressed on a war footing. Problems related to water, sanitation and hygiene are huge in India. Water scarcity has been affecting more than 40% of people around the world with increasing temperatures as a result of climate change. Although, about 2.1 billion people have access to improved water sanitation since 1990, there is decreasing supplies of safe drinking water impacting every continent.¹ This paper aims to address the key development challenges faced in the realization of sustainable development goals in India with special focus on Golaghat district of Assam. It will also attempt to assess its influence on the adjoining villages in the successful implementation of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

Key Words: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL), Assam.

¹ "Goal 6: Clean Water & Sanitation", United Nations Development Programme, 2018, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-6-clean-water-and-sanitation.html>

The post-2015 development agenda of the UN with its new framework and structure set to address the unfinished MDG agenda through 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) by 2030. The SDGs is very much relevant for south Asian countries, particularly India. Despite, their economic dynamism and remarkable performance in Millennium Development Goal (MDG), it has inadequate clean water and sanitation.

India, the second most populous country in the world with a population of 1.25 billion people, comprises of 30 states, 677 districts and 650,000 villages. The overall proportion of Indian households with access to improved water sources increased from 68% in 1992-93 to 90.6% in 2011-12. However, in 2012, 59% of rural households and 8% of urban households did not have access to improved sanitation facilities. Almost 600 million people in India defecate in the open – the highest number in the world. Improving sanitation is a key priority of the government which has introduced several flagship programmes including the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan to clean India, the National Rural Drinking Water Programme which aims at providing safe clean water and eradicate open defecation by 2019.² Sanitation is one of the biggest problems in India. About 350 million people still practice open defecation in the country.

Assam, which is located in the north eastern region of the country, is one of the richest states of India, The population of Assam represents a unique combination of various ethnic groups that inhabit the rich land from a very long time. Assam is the largest Tea producing state in the country which accounts for 60 percent of Assam's economy. However, problems related to water, sanitation and hygiene are huge in the state. Though there is significant improvements in water and sanitation in the state, the lack of safe confinement and disposal of human excreta poses significant health risks to the people of the state. It is estimated that 1 in every 10 deaths in rural India, is linked to poor sanitation and hygiene. Diarrhea, a common disease, is the largest killer and accounts for

² "Goal 6: Clean Water & Sanitation", United Nations Development Programme, 2018, <http://in.one.un.org/page/sustainable-development-goals/sdg-6/>

one in every 20 deaths.³ The condition of safe drinking water and sanitation of Assam is still very disturbing.

The 2012 Census has given a very dismal picture of water and sanitation facilities in India. Improper planning and casual implementation of schemes coupled with rampant corruption and irregularities in the concerned departments as well as lack of awareness among the public, particularly in the rural areas, have left India behind in this most basic and important aspect of public health. The statistics on drinking water and sanitation of Assam also indicate a very disturbing picture. Lack of sanitation leads to physical and cognitive stunting in children; it also leads to less productive future workforce.

Though, there has been a significant improvement in drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in government schools of Assam ever since the implementation of Swachh Bharat Mission targeting every household to provide sanitary latrine to eradicate open defecation in the country by 2019.

Parivartan organization made a random survey of toilet blocks in 85 government schools in Golaghat district of Assam to know the challenges faced in the implementation of Swachh Bharat Mission in government schools and how Swachh Bharat Mission has influenced the people towards attitude and behavior changes in the district.

Gunotsav is a quality enhancement initiative of the State for bringing about improvement in learning levels of students at Elementary level. Hon'ble Minister, Education, Assam has already announced the implementation of the programme in his budget speech. It aims to evaluate schools and students of schools in order to assess their performance and design strategies to bring about quality improvement in levels of learning as well as in the school environment. Assessment will be done on four core areas viz Academic achievement of children of Class-2 to 8, Co-scholastic

³ "Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Interventions and the Prevention of Diarrhea", World Health Organization, updated October, 2011, http://www.who.int/elena/titles/bbc/wsh_diarrhoea/en/.

activities, Availability and Utilization of School Infrastructure and other facilities and Community Participation.⁴ Due to all these developments almost all schools in Assam are functioning well and better.

Rationale of the Study

Golaghat is one of the prominent district of Assam since 15th of August 1987. The name Golaghat ('Gola' which means shop and 'Ghat' means the landing point of river ferry) originated from the shops established by the 'Marwari' businessman during the mid past of 20th century AD at the bank of river Dhansiri near present Golaghat town. According to Census 2011, the district covers an area of 3502.00 Sq. KM with population of 10,66,888.⁵ It has 4 sub divisions which include Bokakhat, Dergaon, Sarupathar and Merapani with 6 circles and 8 development blocks. The total literacy rate is 77.43% (according to 2011 Census).

There are about 116 government High schools (source: Inspector of school, Golaghat District Circle) and 1769 Lower Primary and Upper Primary schools under Golaghat district of Assam.⁶

Methodology

Methodology of this paper is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data is collected from 85 government schools in Golaghat district. Parivartan NGO monitored the toilet blocks constructed by Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) as part of Swachh Bharat Mission scheme to promote cleanliness & sanitation in schools. The government schools are taken randomly covering every nook and corners of the district.

⁴"Gunotsav", Gunotsavassam, updated June 10, 2018, <http://www.gunotsavassam.org/>.

⁵"Golaghat district", Government of Assam, Golaghat District, accessed, 05th June, 2018, <http://golaghat.gov.in/>

⁶"Inspector of Schools Golaghat, 2017", Government of Assam, Golaghat District, accessed, May 16, 2018, <https://golaghat.gov.in/departments/inspector-of-schools-golaghat>.

Secondary data is used for general information on SDGs and Swachh Bharat Mission to highlight issues related to water and sanitation in India and Assam. It is collected from various research articles, newspapers of online and offline sources, UN and government reports.

Objectives

To know the improvements of toilet blocks in government schools in Golaghat district.

To know the working and functional toilets in the schools.

To know how SBM has changed the behavior and attitude of students and people in the adjoining villages.

To know separate toilets for girls in schools.

Review of Literature

The UN report states that India loses a whopping \$54 billion annually due to the shortage of toilet facilities in the country. As of 2013, our nation also faces highest rate of stunted growth and development among children as a result of exorbitantly high population density, open defecation, and absence of appropriate sanitation methods. This also hastens the spread of fecal-oral transmitted infections and diseases. This is one of the major reasons behind the depletion of vital nutrients among growing children.⁷ Swachh Bharat aims to address open defecation on a war footing.

In Assam, the proportion of schools with working toilets increased by 20 per cent between 2010 and 2012, six per cent between 2012 and 2014, and three per cent between 2014 and 2016. Ideally, the rate of improvement should be increasing over time, if not remain consistent, with an increase in funds. Functional toilets are overall low (33 per cent in 2010, 53 in 2012, 59 in 2014, and 62 in 2016) so the slowing rate of improvement cannot be attributed for being in the remote or difficult to access regions.

⁷ "Swachh Bharat Abhiyan Facts And Figures", Save the Children, accessed, May 4, 2016, <https://www.savethechildren.in/articles/swachh-bharat-abhiyan-facts-and-figures>.

SBM was launched on 2nd Oct 2014, which aimed at making open defecation free (ODF) India to be achieved by 2nd Oct, 2019. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) needs India to achieve a Swachh Bharat. The SBM have covered about 84.89% rural sanitation in the country, 17 ODF states/UTs, 390 ODF districts, and 3.7 lakh ODF villages.⁸

According to the data collected from the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), it was found that only 68.7 per cent of government schools in India had working toilet facilities for students, reason being that the prime focus is on the availability of toilets and not on its functionality.

In 2016, as many as 96.5 per cent of rural elementary government schools had toilets, but more than one in four (27.79 per cent) were dysfunctional or locked, according to data collected for the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). Only about 68.7 per cent of schools had working toilet facilities for students.

In the context of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan-Gramin (Clean India Campaign-Rural) and Swachh Bharat Swachh Vidyalaya (Clean India Clean School) measuring usability of sanitation infrastructure becomes even more important. Broken toilets do not bring us any closer to realizing the vision of Swachh Bharat (Clean India).

While a growth in the percentage of schools with working sanitation provisions has been reported over time, this improvement is slowing across most states, even as sanitation has been at the forefront of India's political discourse, and funding for sanitation policies has increased significantly in the past few years.

The Census 2011 report on water and sanitation says that out of 246,692,667 (191,963,935 in 2001) surveyed households 43.5% (36.7% in 2001) in India have tap water, 11% (18.2% in 2001) has wells, 42% (41.2% in 2001) hand pump/tube well and 3.5% (3.9% in 2001) has other sources of drinking water. The Census-2011 added two new queries on treated and untreated drinking water and on covered or

⁸ "Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation Government of India, 2018", <https://mdws.gov.in/>

uncovered source of drinking water. Here the report says only 32% of Indians use treated drinking water while 11.6% do not use treated drinking water. Similarly only 1.6% households use drinking water from covered sources while 9.4% do not have that. In Assam out of 6,367,295 households only 10.5% (9.2% in 2001) has tap water, 18.9% (26.7% in 2001) has wells and majority 59.4% (46.9% in 2001) use tube wells for drinking water followed by 11.3 % (14.6%) having drinking water from other sources. This is almost ten percentage drop in use of wells and more than 10 percent increase in the use of tube wells for drinking water in Assam. Likewise the only three percent fall of the use of drinking water from other sources like ponds and rivers is also a matter of concern and indicates the failure of concerned departments in policy making and implementation.

In the rural sector the statistics of drinking water condition of the Census-2011 both the national and state figures are of mixed results. While 30.8% (24.3% in 2001) household in rural India has tap water sources for drinking water Assam has only 6.8% (5.4% in 2001). The national figure of wells for drinking water in the rural sector is 13.3% (22.2% in 2001) Assam has 19% (29% in 2001). 51.9% (48.9% in 2001) of rural household in India have drinking water from tube wells while the percentage in Assam is 61.5% (51.4%). On other sources of drinking water in rural India the findings are 4% (4.5% in 2001) and in rural Assam is 12.6% (16.2% in 2001). On treated drinking water the percentage in rural India is 17.9% and that of rural Assam is 5.8%. On untreated water the national figure in the rural sector is 13% and in Assam it is only 1%. Only 1.5% rural households in India collect drinking water from covered sources while in Assam the percentage is dismal 1.1%. Similarly on uncovered sources of drinking water the national figure of rural India is 11.8% and in Assam it is 18%.⁹

In the urban sector the all India Census-2011 findings of drinking water are like this:-70.6% (68.7% in 2001) using tap water, only

⁹ Ahmed Farhana, "Water and Sanitation in India's Census-2012", Scoop, updated March 27, 2012, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL1203/S00268/water-and-sanitation-in-indias-census-2012.htm>.

6.2% (7.7% in 2001) using wells, 20.8% (11.8% in 2001) using hand pumps/ tube wells and 2.55 (2.3% in 2001) using other sources. In Assam statistics are very unimpressive:-30.2% (31.4% in 2001) using tap water which is 1.02% less than the last census, 17.8% (24.6% in 2001) using wells, 48% (35.9% in 2001) using tube wells and 4% (5.1% in 2001) using from other sources. Similarly on the use of treated water in the urban sector Assam's figure (29.4%) is far less than the national figure (62%). 4.5% of urban households in Assam have drinking water from covered sources while 13.1% do not have such.¹⁰

The distance of availability of water from the households is one important matter of concern. The 2011 Census reveals encouraging picture of Assam from the national level. While 46.6% (39% in 2001) Indian households have availability of drinking water inside their premises in Assam the figure is well above 54.8% (37.9% in 2001). The availability of drinking water near the households in India is 35.8% (44.3% in 2001). In Assam it is also less than national figure, from 39.7% in 2001 to 26.7% in 2011. However the state is ahead on the availability of drinking water away from the household. Here Assam's figure is 18.5% (22.5% in 2001) and that of India is 17.6% (16.7% in 2001). On this same category Assam also has impressive figures in the rural sector than the all India figures with 50.4% (33.6% in 2001) of households having drinking water source available within the premises while the national figure is 35% (28.7% in 2001). There is a fall in households in rural Assam of availability of drinking water near the premises from 41.9% in 2001 to 29.3% this time. In India the figure is 42.9% (51.4% in 2001). The availability of drinking water away from the households in the rural sector is 22.1% (19.5% in 2001) at the national level while in Assam it is 20.4% (24.5% in 2001). Assam too has advanced in availability of drinking water sources within the households in the urban sector than the all India level with 78.8% (63.2% in 2001) while national figure is 71.2% (65.4% in 2001). Drinking water sources near urban households in India is 20.7% (25.2% in 2001) and in Assam is 12.8% (26.3% in 2001)

¹⁰ Ahmed, "Water and Sanitation in India's Census-2012"

while away from the households the national figure is 8.1% (9.4% in 2001) and the that of the state is 8.4% (10.5% in 2001).¹¹

On 6th March, the WHO/UNICEF's Joint Monitoring Programme on sanitation for Millennium Development Goal released its report on India which indicated that 59% (626 million) Indians still does not have access to toilets and they use open defecation. The Census-2011 gives another disturbing account of India on sanitation which says 53.1% (63.6% in 2001) households in India does not have a toilet. In the rural sector the percentage is 69.3% (78.1% in 2001) and in the urban areas it is 18.6% (26.3% in 2001). In Assam overall 35.1% (35.4% in 2001) households have no toilet. That means in the last ten years the governmental schemes could reach only 0.3% of the households.

In rural Assam the picture is as same as in 2001 with 40.4% households with no toilet in 2011 Census. In the urban areas the state has 6.3% (5.4% in 2001) households with no toilet. Assam also has over all only 28.5% (15.9% in 2001) households have toilets with water closet (all India figure is 36.4% as against 18% in 2001), 34.7% (43.9% in 2001) households have pit latrines (all India 9.4% as against 11.5%) and 1.8% (4.3% in 2001) households have other types of toilet (all India 1.1% as against 6.9% in 2001). In the rural sector Assam has 20.6% (8.6% in 2001) households having toilets with water closet (all India 19.4% as against 7.1% in 2001), 37.2% (46.9% in 2001) households have pit latrines (all India 10.5% as against 10.3% in 2001) and 1.8% (4% in 2001) households have other toilets (all India 0.8% as against 4.5% in 2001). Similarly in the urban sector the state has an impressive development with 71% (58.9% in 2001) households having toilet with water closet (all India 72.6% as against 46% in 2001). In the pit latrine category Assam has urban households 21.01% (26.4% in 2001) where the national figure is 7.1% (14.6% in 2001). The state has 1.7% (9.3%) urban households with other toilets (all India 1.7% as against 13% in 2001 Census).¹²

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

The increase of allocation of funds for rural drinking water in this year's union budget from Rs 11,000 Crores to Rs 14,000 Crores and from Rs 1500 Crores to Rs 3500 Crores for the rural sanitation programme is the immediate step taken by the union government to address this problem. However policy making and implementation and public awareness hold the key to improve the water and sanitation standards of India.¹³

In Assam, for example, the proportion of schools with working toilets increased by 20 per cent between 2010 and 2012, six per cent between 2012 and 2014, and three per cent between 2014 and 2016. Ideally, the rate of improvement should be increasing over time, if not remain consistent, with an increase in funds. Functional toilets are overall low (33 per cent in 2010, 53 in 2012, 59 in 2014, and 62 in 2016) so the slowing rate of improvement cannot be attributed to the last remaining remote or difficult to access regions.¹⁴

Analysis and Interpretation

This study was carried out across 85 government schools as a sample survey to examine the extent of maintenance and improvements of toilet blocks in schools of Golaghat district of Assam. Parivartan NGO being supported by Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) to promote cleanliness & sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission in government schools and public places helped in collecting data from schools for the study. The Analysis and Interpretation focus on the following Issues:

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ranajit Bhattacharyya and Aadarsh Gangwar, "Why India Needs To Count Its Broken Toilets", India Spend, updated July 19, 2017, <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/why-india-needs-to-count-its-broken-toilets-45759>.

TABLE - 1

Types of toilets in schools			
Pucca	Semi-Pucca	Kucca	Total
100%	0%	0%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 01

Type of Toilets in Government Schools

TABLE - 2

Water facility in the toilet block					
Tube-Well	Tap-Water	Both Tube-well & Tap water	Well	All the above	Total
47.07%	0%	51.76%	1.17%	0%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 02

TABLE - 3

Cleaning Schedule of toilet blocks			
Daily	Weekly	Now & Then	Total
45.80%	45.80%	8.40%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 03

TABLE - 4

Who cleans the toilet block in schools?				
Students	Teachers	Peon	Paid Labourers	Total
75.4%	0%	12.9%	11.7%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 04

TABLE - 5

Do the schools get maintenance cost for the toilet block from the government?		
Yes	No	Total
0%	100%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 05

First, in terms of improvements of toilet blocks in government schools in Golaghat district, the survey found that about 100% of toilet blocks in government schools are Pucca which means concrete block. Pucca toilets are better than semi-pucca or kucca toilet because

it is concrete and easier to maintain. There are tube-well and tap water facilities as water facility at the toilet block. Mostly, every school has concrete toilet block and a tube-well as water facility in school. About 47.07% tube-well, 51.76% both tube-well as well as tape water and 1.17% well for water facility in schools.

The study also found that government does not provide maintenance cost to maintain the toilet blocks separately. The government provides some costs annually for the overall maintenance of the school. However, there has been a considerable improvement of toilet blocks in government schools in Golaghat district since the launch of Swachh Bharat scheme in the country.

While, about 45.80% toilet blocks in schools are maintained daily, 45.80% on weekly basis and 8.40% now & then which means that the toilet block is maintained clean. The study found that about 45.80% students clean the toilet blocks by themselves, 12.9% by peon and 11.7% by paid labourers. While, the toilet block constructed by NRL under Swachh Bharat Mission Scheme is being monitored on regular basis and provides maintenance cost annually to maintain the toilet block of the school.

TABLE - 6

Are there handwashing facilities at the school?		
Yes	No	Total
81.2%	18.8%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 06

TABLE - 7

Are both soap and water currently available at the handwashing facilities?				
Yes, water and soap	Water only	Soap only	Neither water or soap	Total

42.42%	56.40%	0%	1.18%	100%
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Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 07

TABLE - 8

Is there working toilets in schools?		
Yes	No	Total
100%	0%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 08

TABLE - 9

What percent of students use the toilet blocks in schools?				
91-100 %	81-90 %	71-80 %	51-70 %	Total
61.17%	29.41%	9.42%	0%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 09

TABLE - 10

Are toilet blocks in schools functional?		
Yes	No	Total
100%	0%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 10

Second, relating to the working and functional toilets in schools, the study found that about 81.2% schools have hand washing facility at schools whereas 18.8% schools does not have hand washing facilities despite implementation of Swachh Bharat

scheme in schools which aims at promoting hygiene practices and create awareness on proper hand washing with soap. About 42.42% schools have both water and soap, 56.40% water only and only a marginal of 1.18% schools have neither water nor soap at the hand washing place to promote hygiene practice in schools.

According to ASER report 2017, the proportion of schools with working toilets increased by 20 per cent between 2010 and 2012, six per cent between 2012 and 2014, and three per cent between 2014 and 2016. Functional toilets are overall low (33% in 2010, 53% in 2012, 59% in 2014, and 62% in 2016). So the slowing rate of improvement cannot be attributed to the last remaining remote or difficult to access regions. However, it was interesting to find that 100% schools have both working as well as functional toilets in schools. But, with regard to usage of toilet in schools it was found that about 61.17 % students from 91-100%, 29.41% from 81-90% and 9.42% from 71-80% use toilets for their needs respectively. There is a significant improvement on the usage of toilet by students ever since the launch of Swachh Bharat Mission in the country.

TABLE - 11

Do you know about Swachh Bharat Mission?		
Yes	No	Total
100%	0%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 11

TABLE - 12

Has it changed your sanitary practices?		
Yes	No	Total
52.94%	47.06%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 12

TABLE - 13

How do you promote cleanliness in the school?				
Cleaning before school hour and during work experience	Through observance of important dates in the calendar	By organizing Swachhata competitions & prize distribution	All the above	Total
32.90%	4.70%	31.72%	30.68%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 13

TABLE - 14

To what percentage has the open defecation reduced in schools?				
91 -100 %	81 - 90 %	71-80 %	51 - 70 %	Total
29.40%	24.88%	30.50%	15.22%	100%

Figure - 14

TABLE - 15

How has students influenced their parents on cleanliness & sanitation at home?					
Demand for toilet at home	Using toilets for defecation	Using soaps for washing hands after defecation and before meals	Keeping clean their homes and courtyard.	All the above	Total
8.20%	27%	17.60%	7%	40.20%	100%

Figure -15

TABLE - 16

How NGO and other agencies' intervention have influenced students towards bringing attitude and behaviour changes in them?					
(a) Through awareness drive	(b) Through organizing different competitions & prize distribution	(c) Through cleanliness drive	(d) Through regular follow up and monitoring	(e) All the above	Total
8.20%	43.50%	0%	0%	48.30%	100%

Figure - 16

Third, while assessing the impact of Swachh Bharat Mission, the study found that the mission has highly influenced the people across the country. Of course, there is some change taking place in the mindset and behavior of people especially parents. About 52.94% respondents say that Swachh Bharat Mission has really changed their sanitary practices ever since the start of the mission, whereas, 47.06% respondents say that their attitude & behavior on sanitary practices has not changed. So, they act as per their convenience de-

spite constant awareness on cleanliness and sanitation by various agencies. About 32.90% schools promote cleanliness by cleaning before the class and during work experiences, whereas about 4.70% school promote the same through observing important dates of the calendar. It was found that 31.72% do it by organizing competitions and prize distributions and 30.68% schools adopt all the above. The open defecation in schools has reduced considerably. About 29.40% schools from 91 -100% use toilets for their needs, 15.22% schools from 51-70% use toilets respectively. Still some students in schools go in the open for their needs despite implementation of Swachh Bharat Mission scheme in the country.

The students have become agents of change at their home and neighbourhood through cleanliness and proper hygiene practices. About 8.20% students demanded toilets at home, 27%. About 40.20% students say that they follow all the above which means there is considerable change on cleanliness, sanitation and hygiene by students. The NGOs and other agencies play as a catalyst towards promoting cleanliness, sanitation and hygiene in schools as well as in public places through their activities and programmes. To promote cleanliness, sanitation and hygiene among students about 8.20% schools conducted awareness programmes, 43.50% chose to organize different competitions and prize distribution, whereas, 48.30% adopted all the above measures. This means that the intervention of NGOs and other agencies has brought significant improvements in cleanliness in schools and public places across Assam.

TABLE - 17

Are there separate toilets for girls?		
Yes	No	Total
71.70%	28.30%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 17

TABLE - 18

Are government toilet blocks maintained better than NRL toilet blocks in schools?		
Yes	No	Total
5.80%	94.20%	100%

Source: Sample Survey

Figure - 18

Fourth, the study found that there are separate toilets for both boys and girls in high, middle, primary and a few at lower primary schools. About 71.70% schools have separate toilets for girls, while, 28.30% schools do not have separate toilets for girls particularly at lower primary level. Perhaps, there is only one toilet block which is being used both by boys and girls. But according to ASER report 2016, 21% schools still do not have drinking water facility, 3.6% schools are functioning without toilet facility, 11.7% schools have no provision for separate toilets for girls.¹⁵ There have been significant improvements with regard to drinking water facility, functioning of schools, separate toilets for girls and both working as well as functional toilets in schools since the launch of Swachh Bharat Mission.

Meanwhile, the study made a comparison with NRL toilet blocks and government toilet block. It was found that NRL toilets are better maintained and taken care of than government toilets. This is because; NRL provides maintenance cost annually to maintain the toilet blocks constructed by them. About 94.20% schools say that NRL toilets are maintained better than government toilets and only few school which is about 5.80% say that government toilets are better than NRL toilets.

Even the government toilet blocks are maintained well because the government officials officially or unofficially visit the schools and insist with the school authorities to keep the toilets clean. Besides, 'Gunotsav' is first-of-its-kind initiative by the government

¹⁵ "Assam last on education list", The Telegraph India, January 2017, https://www.telegraphindia.com/1170124/jsp/northeast/story_132047.jsp.

of Assam for a quality enhancement initiative for bringing about improvement in learning level of students at Elementary level. The government officials physically visit and monitor every school to understand the performance and improvements of the schools across Assam. With all these developmental initiatives of the government almost all schools are functioning well in Assam.

Suggestions to Overcome these Problems

First, water and sanitation should be considered legally enforceable rights and reflected in legislation.

Second, women and girls should be members of Water User Associations, regardless of land ownership.

Third, water and sanitation facilities for migrants and for labourers at work site.

Fourth, convergence of water and sanitation programme with health and education at all levels, with strict monitoring for implementation.

Fifth, inclusion of awareness programmes on menstrual hygiene as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission.

Sixth, mechanisms to develop the capacity of school authorities/ SMC to take up the responsibility of planning, implementing, managing and monitoring water and sanitation programmes in schools.

Seventh, social audit by students and SMC with the involvement of Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) members and of NGOs with special focus on access by the excluded and marginalized communities.

Eighth, engagement with NGOs and media in monitoring of plans and implementation of water and sanitation in the country.

Last, strong emphasis on Information, Education and Communication (IEC), Capacity Building and Hygiene Education for effective behaviour change.

Conclusion

Clean, accessible water and sanitation for all is an essential part of the world we want to live in. Through the different schemes and programmes under water & sanitation initiated by the Indian government, since independence, a lot has been done but it is not completely complete because the problem is huge. Awareness and education regarding clean water, hygiene and sanitation should be conducted at all levels to bring about change, development and to create a healthy environment in this country. Women, adolescent girl are the most affected and they become vulnerable to safety and dignity due to lack of proper sanitation.

Concerted effort by government, corporate houses, scholars, teachers, NGOs, professionals, students and media should come together to work towards a world where everyone's rights and freedom is respected and everyone lives with equality and dignity. So, let's join hands together to eradicate open defecation and achieve Swachh Bharat by 2019.