



The Impact Of Public Toilet Timings And Sanitization On Women's Health And Menstrual Comfort

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Abstract: The accessibility and cleanliness of public toilets play a critical role in ensuring women's overall health and well-being. This paper delves into the challenges posed by the operational hours and Sanitization standards of public restrooms, examining how these factors affect women's health, particularly during their menstrual periods. Through a synthesis of existing literature, research reports, and case studies, the paper aims to highlight gaps in current public facilities and propose actionable recommendations for improvement. This research work highlights major issue affecting both men and women lives.

- 1. Introduction** Public sanitation facilities are essential for maintaining public health. However, for women, access to clean and well-maintained public toilets is not just a matter of convenience but a fundamental need, especially during menstruation. Limited access to such facilities due to restrictive timings or inadequate hygiene can have profound health implications. These days women are working late night and traveling around the corners of the world I have seen washrooms getting closed at late night. Some of the places get them closed even before 12 and it is making things more complicated. controlling the urine discharge is harmful for everyone. And for women during menstrual cycle It will lead to a blunder. If the public toilets are closed, unhygienic and less in facilities like sanitary pads and incinerators, how would they manage and how the Indian govt will claim to ensure the SDG goals and Fundamental right of dignity of life for Indian citizens.
- 2. Some reports and surveys –** The following surveys give us a proof of the current conditions of public toilets. This is truly a biggest challenge. The public toilets be at Bus stops, Railway stations, Govt Hospitals, public roads are not as expected. Such cases also must be raised in national and international parliaments. As this is a basic human need and is contributing at a biggest label in diseases.

Following reports are giving us the insight of how much ground work is required to get this improved.

National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2021), Found significant regional disparities in the quality and availability of public toilets. Urban areas showed better access compared to rural areas, but even urban facilities often lacked maintenance and adequate sanitation.

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (2023 Report), Indicated that while coverage of public toilets in urban areas has improved due to the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*, only about 50% of these facilities meet acceptable hygiene standards. Reports highlight issues such as broken fixtures, absence of running water, and a lack of basic supplies like soap and toilet paper.

Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) 2023 Study, Showed that sanitation worker shortages and inconsistent cleaning schedules contributed to unsanitary conditions in public restrooms. Emphasized that only 35% of surveyed facilities had functional soap dispensers, and even fewer had hand dryers or paper towels.

Global Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Survey 2022: Noted that over 60% of public toilets did not have safe disposal units for menstrual products. Highlighted the anxiety faced by women due to inadequate privacy and the lack of water during menstruation.

Local NGO and Media Investigations, Reports by organizations like *Safai Haq* and media outlets have exposed issues such as non-operational toilets after certain hours (e.g., after 8-10 PM), contributing to health risks for women who work late shifts. Surveys from 2023 showed that many urban areas, despite having constructed public restrooms, suffered from poor maintenance and vandalism.

3. Importance of Timely Accessibility Women require flexible access to public toilets, especially those who work long or unconventional hours. According to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO), limited access to sanitation facilities contributes to increased risks of UTIs and other health issues. Research from the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) indicates that more than 50% of women in urban areas face difficulties accessing toilets during non-standard hours, leading to prolonged retention of bodily waste and subsequent health complications. Furthermore, studies have shown that controlling urine discharge for long periods can result in severe bladder issues, especially for women, who are already at higher risk due to anatomical factors.

Recent observations show that many public washrooms close before midnight, creating significant challenges for women who work night shifts or travel late at night. This lack of availability puts additional strain on women, forcing them to control natural bodily functions, which can cause discomfort, pain, and potential health repercussions. The impact is even more severe for women during their menstrual cycle, where access to clean and private facilities is critical.

4. Menstrual Period Comfort and Public Toilets During their menstrual periods, women need facilities equipped with clean water, safe disposal options for menstrual products, and a hygienic environment. The Global Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) report indicates that nearly 70% of women in developing countries struggle with managing menstruation due to inadequate public facilities. This lack not only impacts their comfort but can lead to issues like rashes, infections, and even reproductive health problems. A 2023 survey by Plan International found that 58% of women reported avoiding public places altogether during their periods due to poor toilet conditions. Psychological stress due to inadequate facilities can also contribute to poor mental health outcomes.

Public toilets that lack menstrual products, such as sanitary pads and disposal facilities like incinerators, make it even harder for women to manage their periods with dignity. The Indian government's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly those related to health and well-being, gender equality, and clean water and sanitation, calls for urgent attention to these shortcomings.

5. Sanitization Challenges Poorly maintained restrooms pose a major concern for women's health. A study by UNICEF highlighted that inadequate sanitation contributes to 10% of the global burden of diseases. Unsanitary conditions, particularly in restrooms without basic amenities like soap and running water, can facilitate the spread of infections. Research published in the *Journal of Women's Health* shows that women are at a higher risk of bacterial and fungal infections during menstruation if sanitation facilities are substandard. The absence of proper

sanitary disposal units further compounds these risks, leading to improper disposal practices and increased health hazards.

6. **Impact on Overall Health** The cumulative effect of these issues is significant. Poor hygiene and limited access to public toilets can lead to repeated infections, compromising women's immune systems and long-term health. According to a 2022 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), repeated urinary and reproductive tract infections due to poor hygiene can have lasting impacts on women's reproductive health. Furthermore, societal stigma surrounding menstruation can discourage women from voicing their needs, resulting in overlooked policy gaps and slow progress in addressing these challenges.

Here's some detailed information on how unhygienic toilets can lead to multiple diseases:

Reports and Studies on Unhygienic Public Toilets and Associated Health Risks

A. Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs):

- Studies have shown that prolonged use of unhygienic toilet facilities can increase the risk of UTIs, particularly for women. Contaminated surfaces, lack of clean water, and insufficient handwashing facilities contribute to the spread of bacteria like *E. coli*, which is a common cause of UTIs.

- Global Health Research (2022) noted that in countries like India, where access to clean toilets is limited, the incidence of UTIs in women is disproportionately higher, impacting their overall health and productivity.

B. Gastrointestinal Infections:

- Unhygienic conditions in public restrooms, such as unclean toilets and lack of soap or running water, facilitate the spread of bacteria and viruses causing diseases like diarrhea, cholera, and dysentery.

- A World Health Organization (WHO) report indicated that inadequate sanitation is linked to more than 432,000 deaths globally each year from diarrheal diseases.

C. Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs):

- Poor menstrual hygiene due to unclean public toilets without sanitary disposal units or water can lead to RTIs. A lack of proper facilities forces women to use unhygienic methods or delay changing sanitary products, which increases the risk of infections.

- A 2022 study by the Journal of Women's Health highlighted that women who use poorly maintained public toilets are more susceptible to conditions such as bacterial vaginosis and other RTIs.

D. Skin and Fungal Infections:

- The moist and poorly ventilated environment of many public toilets can lead to the growth of fungi and other pathogens. Women using such toilets may develop skin rashes, yeast infections, or other fungal infections.

- Dermatological research has linked frequent use of contaminated toilet facilities to higher rates of dermatitis and other skin issues.

E. Parasitic Infections:

- Toilets with poor drainage systems and stagnant water can harbor parasites that cause diseases such as giardiasis and hookworm infections. These conditions are exacerbated when public toilets are located near areas with open sewers or inadequate waste management.

F. Mental Health Impact:

- The anxiety and stress associated with using dirty or unsafe public restrooms can have psychological effects. This is particularly concerning for women during menstruation when the need for clean and private facilities is heightened.

- Research from a 2023 mental health survey in India found that 68% of women reported feeling stress and discomfort due to the lack of clean public toilets, especially during their menstrual cycle.

Real-World Data and Statistics:

- National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2021-2022): Found that while toilet access has improved in India, over 40% of public toilets were reported to be poorly maintained and unhygienic.

- Centre for Science and Environment (2023): Reported that only 30-40% of public restrooms had functional handwashing facilities, contributing to a higher risk of disease transmission.

Addressing the issues of public toilet hygiene is critical for public health, particularly for women. Effective policy implementation, regular maintenance, and the provision of essential facilities like running water, soap, Sanitary Pads and disposal units are crucial to reducing these health risks.

6. Recommendations for Policy Improvements

- **Extended Operating Hours:** Public toilets should remain open for extended hours to accommodate women's needs, especially those working night shifts. Studies from urban development research indicate that extending public toilet hours can reduce the incidence of health issues among women by up to 30%.
- **Regular Cleaning and Maintenance:** Ensuring that public restrooms are cleaned frequently and stocked with essential supplies is crucial. According to research by the World Bank, regular maintenance can significantly decrease the spread of infectious diseases.
- **Menstrual Hygiene Management:** Incorporating menstrual hygiene solutions, such as sanitary disposal units and vending machines for menstrual products, should become a standard practice. The MHM report recommends such measures as vital to improving women's health outcomes.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Initiatives that educate the public on the importance of hygiene and the unique needs of women can foster a supportive environment and drive policy changes. Studies have shown that public awareness can lead to faster implementation of health-centric policies.

7. **Sanitization and women health related policies and call for initiatives** – The worst condition we got to know is in existence instead of the availability of a large scaled framework for ensuring improvement and better health for ex . Fundamental rights given to the citizens of India and SDGs one of the responsibility of govt of India.

A. Some of the SDGs Related to sanitization and women health-

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that relate to women's health and hygienic public toilets are primarily:

SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

This goal focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. It includes targets related to maternal health, access to sexual and reproductive health services, and reducing health risks, which are directly impacted by access to clean and safe sanitation, including menstrual hygiene management.

. SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

This goal is directly related to access to sanitation and hygiene facilities. It aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Targets under SDG 6 focus on achieving universal access to safe and affordable drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene, especially in schools and public places, which is critical for women's health, particularly in relation to menstrual health and dignity.

SDG 5: Gender Equality

This goal focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. One of its targets includes ensuring women's full participation in all aspects of public and private life, including access to sanitation facilities that address their specific needs, such as during menstruation. Clean, accessible public toilets are vital to women's health, dignity, and well-being, enabling them to participate fully in society without the risk of sanitation-related illnesses.

Together, these SDGs address the interconnectedness of women's health, sanitation, and gender equality. Access to hygienic public toilets is a key component in ensuring the health, dignity, and empowerment of women.

B. Fundamental Rights –

In the context of women's health and access to hygienic public toilets, several fundamental rights provided in the Indian Constitution are relevant:

Right to Life and Personal Liberty (Article 21)

- Article 21 guarantees the right to life and personal liberty to every individual, which includes the right to live with dignity. Access to hygienic sanitation facilities, including public toilets, is crucial for ensuring that women can live with dignity, particularly during menstruation. Denial of such access can violate their right to personal liberty and health.

Right to Equality (Article 14, 15, and 16)

- Article 14 ensures that every individual is treated equally before the law.
 - Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. In the context of sanitation, women must not be discriminated against when it comes to access to safe and clean public toilets.
 - Article 16 ensures equal opportunities for all citizens in matters of public employment, which also implies the need for gender-sensitive infrastructure, such as public toilets, in the workplace and other public spaces.

Right to Health (Part of Article 21)

- The Right to Health has been read into the Right to Life under Article 21 by the judiciary. This includes the right to access essential services, such as sanitation and healthcare. For women, this right encompasses access to sanitation facilities that support their menstrual health, which is critical for overall well-being.

Right to Education (Article 21-A)

- Article 21-A provides the right to free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years. The provision of hygienic toilets in schools is critical for ensuring that girls can attend school regularly, especially during menstruation. Lack of access to sanitation facilities often leads to school dropouts among girls, undermining their right to education.

Protection of Women from Exploitation (Article 23)

- Article 23 prohibits human trafficking and forced labor. While this provision directly addresses exploitation, it also has implications for ensuring women's dignity and rights in public spaces, including access to necessary sanitation services, without exploitation or degradation.

C. Some Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) – DPSP including Article 38, 47, and 51-A also ethically ask govt to fulfill the responsibilities as follows –

- Article 38 directs the state to promote the welfare of the people and secure a social order based on justice. This includes ensuring equitable access to essential services, including sanitation, especially for women who face unique challenges.

- Article 47 enjoins the state to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living, and to improve public health. Ensuring access to clean public toilets is a part of this responsibility, particularly for women's health during menstruation.

- Article 51-A lays down fundamental duties, urging citizens to strive towards the promotion of harmony and the improvement of the environment. Citizens should be mindful of ensuring cleanliness and hygiene, particularly in public spaces, to ensure women's health and dignity.

D. Special Provisions for Women and Children (Article 15(3))

- Article 15(3) allows the state to make special provisions for women and children. This has led to various laws and policies aimed at improving the health and safety of women, including ensuring they have access to sanitation facilities, particularly during menstruation.

These fundamental rights form the basis of various legislative and policy measures in India aimed at ensuring that women have access to hygienic public toilets, enabling them to live with dignity, pursue education, and lead healthy lives.

8. Learn From History – For sanitation and local govt role into it, South Indian history can be one of the best examples that can be seen as follows –

The history of local governance in South India, particularly in the context of sanitation, reflects a long-standing tradition of community-based efforts to maintain public health and cleanliness. Historically, South Indian kingdoms and cities, especially under the rule of the Cholas, Pandyas, Vijayanagara Empire, and later British colonial administrations, demonstrated advanced systems of local governance that took sanitation seriously. Over time, modern local governments in South India have continued to build on these historical foundations. Here's a look at some key examples of how local governance in South India has ensured better sanitation:

1. Ancient and Medieval Periods

Chola Dynasty (850–1279 CE)

The Chola dynasty, particularly during the reign of Rajaraja Chola I and Rajendra Chola I, is known for its advanced urban planning and infrastructure. They had a well-organized system for maintaining public cleanliness and sanitation, especially in cities like Thanjavur and Kanchipuram.

- **Water Management:** The Cholas implemented advanced water management techniques, including the construction of large reservoirs, canals, and irrigation systems that helped maintain a clean and sustainable water supply.

- **Urban Planning:** Towns and cities under the Chola Empire were carefully planned with well-laid roads and drainage systems, ensuring that wastewater and sewage were properly managed. This system helped reduce the spread of diseases in urban areas.

- Public Works: Local governance during the Chola period oversaw the maintenance of infrastructure, including public baths, wells, and latrines, ensuring public hygiene.

Pandya Dynasty (6th–16th centuries)

The Pandyas, who ruled over much of what is now Tamil Nadu, also focused on urban planning, which indirectly helped sanitation.

- Water Wells and Tanks: The Pandyas constructed many tanks and wells for drinking water, while also ensuring waste was disposed of in a controlled manner, which helped prevent contamination and maintain public health.

- Temple Towns: In ancient temple towns like Madurai, local governance was closely linked with temple administration, which often took the responsibility of managing the town's water and sanitation needs. Public baths and well-maintained drainage systems were common in these areas.

Vijayanagara Empire (14th–17th centuries)

The Vijayanagara Empire, centered around Hampi in Karnataka, was known for its grand urban planning and focus on public health and sanitation.

- Water Supply and Sewage: The city of Hampi had a sophisticated water distribution system with canals, tanks, and wells that ensured a steady supply of clean water. Additionally, the sewage and drainage systems were designed to ensure waste was efficiently removed from the city.

- Public Health Infrastructure: Temples and large public buildings often had separate sanitation facilities, and the local governance structure included regulations around cleanliness and water management.

2. British Colonial Period (19th Century)

Under British colonial rule, local governance in South India began to formalize, and sanitation became a key focus as cities grew rapidly.

Madras (Chennai) Municipal Corporation (Established in 1688)

Madras was one of the earliest cities in India to establish a municipal corporation. It became a model for urban sanitation in the colonial period.

- Sanitation Initiatives: In the 19th century, the Madras Corporation was instrumental in establishing public sanitation systems, including public latrines, waste management, and regular cleaning of streets. The Sanitary Commissioner position was established in the city to monitor sanitation practices.

- The 1864 Sanitation Act: This was a pivotal law that gave the Madras Municipal Corporation the authority to manage public health issues, including waste disposal, drainage, and public toilets.

Bombay (Mumbai) and Bangalore

While these cities were part of the larger British colonial urban system, they also influenced South Indian cities like Bangalore (now Bengaluru) and Madras (Chennai). Local governance structures in these cities worked to improve sanitation by introducing systems for cleaning streets, managing waste, and providing public toilets.

3. Post-Independence Period (1947–Present)

After independence, South Indian states began modernizing their local governance systems, with sanitation becoming a critical area of focus in urban development. The central and state governments in South India have undertaken several initiatives to improve public sanitation.

The Chennai Model of Sanitation

- Chennai (formerly Madras) continued to improve its sanitation systems post-independence. The Chennai Corporation has worked extensively to improve solid waste management, street cleaning, and the construction of public toilets.
- Waste Management: In the late 20th century, the Chennai Corporation introduced a comprehensive waste management system that included door-to-door garbage collection, segregating waste, and recycling. The city also introduced public-private partnerships to improve sanitation services.
- Public Toilets for Women: In the early 2000s, Chennai focused on building more public toilets for women, especially in busy urban areas, addressing gender-specific sanitation needs.

Bangalore (Bengaluru)

- Sanitation Improvement Plans: The Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BMP) has worked on improving sanitation by providing better waste disposal services, constructing public toilets, and improving drainage systems.
- Eco-Friendly Toilets: Bangalore has also been a leader in promoting eco-friendly sanitation solutions, like composting toilets and biogas toilets, to address the issue of water scarcity and improve the waste management system in the city.

Hyderabad

- GHMC (Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation) has focused on building more public toilets, especially for women, in response to growing urbanization and increased demand for sanitation.
- Solid Waste Management: Hyderabad's local government has implemented initiatives for waste segregation, recycling, and proper disposal. The city has also improved its stormwater drainage systems to prevent waterlogging and disease outbreaks.

4. Role of Local Bodies in Rural Areas

Local governance in rural South India has also played a significant role in improving sanitation, particularly through the implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission) and state-specific initiatives.

Kerala's Panchayat System

- Decentralized Governance: Kerala has one of the most successful models of decentralized governance. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) have been active in managing sanitation at the grassroots level. Local self-governments are empowered to design and implement sanitation projects.
- Total Sanitation Campaign: Kerala's Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) has been particularly successful in ensuring the construction of toilets in rural homes. The state has also focused on promoting sanitation through community-led initiatives.

Tamil Nadu

- Rural Sanitation Schemes: Tamil Nadu has been a frontrunner in implementing rural sanitation schemes under the Swachh Bharat Mission, especially in remote areas where local governance bodies, such as village panchayats, ensure that toilets are built, maintained, and used.

5. Modern Innovations and Initiatives

Kerala

- Ongoing Initiatives: Kerala has made remarkable strides in ensuring sanitation, with local governments playing a critical role in providing toilets for women and improving waste management. The state has become one of the leaders in achieving open defecation-free (ODF) status.

Tamil Nadu

- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Tamil Nadu's urban local bodies have partnered with private companies and NGOs to improve sanitation in cities like Chennai, Coimbatore, and Madurai. These collaborations have focused on building public toilets, maintaining sanitation infrastructure, and improving waste management.

Conclusion

Historically, South Indian kingdoms and later colonial and post-independence local governments demonstrated significant achievements in managing sanitation. Today, cities like Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Kerala's decentralized rural sanitation initiatives continue to build on these traditions. By combining traditional knowledge with modern solutions, local governance in South India has made significant progress in ensuring better sanitation, though challenges remain, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas. Moving forward, it is essential to continue improving sanitation with a gender-sensitive approach, ensuring that public toilets are safe, accessible, and well-maintained, especially for women.

9. **The Way forward** – For lasting improvements in women's access to hygienic public toilets, collaboration between the central government, state governments, local governments, and international organizations is crucial. Through financial resources, technical assistance, policy development, and on-the-ground projects, these stakeholders can work together to ensure that women in India have access to safe, dignified sanitation facilities.

A comprehensive approach will not only improve health outcomes for women but also contribute to greater gender equality, empowerment, and social inclusion.

The central government and international organizations have a critical role to play in the way forward to improve access to hygienic public toilets for women in India. They can provide leadership, funding, policy direction, and technical expertise to support local efforts. Here's how their responsibilities align. Also they can encourage and regulate the local govt actions and ensure their active and positive participation into it.

Central Government's Responsibility

1. Policy Formulation and Legislative Support

- **Enacting and Enforcing Laws:** The central government is responsible for enacting and enforcing laws that prioritize women's sanitation needs. This includes ensuring that national laws, like the Swachh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission), National Urban Sanitation Policy, and the National Rural Sanitation Strategy, are gender-sensitive and specifically address women's hygiene requirements, including menstrual hygiene management.

- **Gender-Sensitive National Guidelines:** Develop comprehensive national guidelines that outline the design and standards for women-friendly toilets in both urban and rural areas. These guidelines should specify features like menstrual hygiene disposal units, privacy considerations, accessibility for disabled women, and safety protocols.

2. Financial Support and Incentives

- **Allocating Funds for Women's Sanitation:** The central government can allocate dedicated funds to improve sanitation facilities specifically for women, with a focus on underserved regions. This could include financing the construction of public toilets and providing operational subsidies for maintenance.

- **Performance-Based Financial Incentives:** Provide financial incentives to states and local governments based on their performance in building and maintaining hygienic toilets for women. States that exceed expectations in

terms of creating accessible, clean, and well-maintained facilities could receive additional grants or budget allocations.

3. National Awareness and Advocacy Campaigns

- **Mass Awareness Campaigns:** The central government can launch large-scale media campaigns focused on the importance of menstrual hygiene and women's sanitation. This would help destigmatize menstruation and raise awareness about the need for safe and clean public toilets for women.

- **Community Education Programs:** Promote menstrual health education across the country through various government schemes, emphasizing the need for improved sanitation facilities in public spaces. Schools, colleges, and rural areas should be prioritized for such initiatives.

4. Monitoring and Accountability

- **Setting Up Monitoring Mechanisms:** The central government should establish independent monitoring bodies to track the implementation and effectiveness of sanitation programs for women. These bodies could audit toilet construction and maintenance, ensuring that public toilets meet the required standards for women's safety and health.

- **Data Collection and Research:** Support national research efforts to assess the status of women's access to public sanitation facilities. Collect data on how many women have access to adequate sanitation and identify areas that require urgent intervention.

5. Collaborations with State Governments and Local Bodies

- **Capacity Building for Local Governments:** Provide training and resources to local governments and municipal bodies to ensure they have the technical and managerial skills to maintain hygienic public toilets. This could involve workshops, resource guides, and consultations with experts.

- **Incentivize Public-Private Partnerships:** Encourage the private sector and civil society organizations to collaborate with state and local governments in the construction, maintenance, and operation of women-friendly public sanitation facilities.

6. Integration with Other Government Programs

- **Integrate with Swachh Bharat Mission and Other Programs:** Ensure that women's sanitation is incorporated into existing national programs like the Swachh Bharat Mission, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY). The central government should ensure that sanitation facilities for women are a core part of urban and rural development plans.

International Organizations' Responsibility

1. Financial and Technical Support

- **Funding and Grants:** International organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, and Asian Development Bank (ADB), can provide financial resources and grants to support the development of women-friendly sanitation infrastructure. These organizations can also help fund specific projects that improve menstrual health hygiene in public toilets.

- **Technical Assistance and Innovation:** International bodies can offer technical expertise and innovative solutions for creating safe, clean, and sustainable public toilets. This could include the development of eco-friendly technologies, smart sanitation systems, and waste treatment solutions that can be used in public facilities.

2. Policy Guidance and Best Practices

- **Sharing Best Practices:** International organizations can facilitate the sharing of best practices from other countries that have successfully improved women's access to sanitation. They can provide case studies, models, and proven strategies that could be adapted to the Indian context.

- **Global Advocacy for Women's Sanitation:** Organizations like UN Women, WHO, and UNICEF can advocate for the prioritization of women's health and sanitation on the global stage. They can push for policies that place emphasis on gender-sensitive sanitation in international forums and provide recommendations for scaling successful programs globally.

3. Research and Data Collection

- **Data and Research on Menstrual Health:** International organizations can support research into menstrual health and hygiene needs, especially in developing countries. This can include surveys, case studies, and impact assessments to identify gaps in women's access to sanitary public toilets and inform future policy.

- **Monitoring Global SDG Progress:** International bodies can help track progress on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), with a specific focus on women's access to sanitation. This can provide valuable data and hold governments accountable for their commitments to improve sanitation for women.

4. Capacity Building and Training

- **Building Local Capacity:** International organizations can collaborate with local governments to train officials on how to implement gender-sensitive sanitation solutions. They can offer capacity-building workshops and resources to strengthen the technical and managerial skills of those responsible for building and maintaining women-friendly toilets.

- **Supporting Local NGOs:** Many international organizations support grassroots NGOs that focus on women's health, sanitation, and empowerment. They can help build the capacity of these NGOs to advocate for and implement sanitation solutions in communities.

5. Raising Awareness and Advocacy

- **Global Campaigns on Menstrual Hygiene:** Through initiatives like Menstrual Hygiene Day, international organizations can create global awareness about the importance of menstrual hygiene and the role of clean public toilets in ensuring women's health and dignity. These campaigns can create global momentum for improving access to hygienic toilets for women in public spaces.

- **Advocacy for Gender-Responsive Sanitation:** International organizations can advocate for including gender-responsive sanitation as a priority in national development policies, especially in areas where women face unique challenges related to menstruation, safety, and privacy.

6. Promote Sustainable and Inclusive Solutions

- **Promote Green Technologies:** International organizations can encourage the adoption of environmentally sustainable sanitation technologies, such as waterless toilets, solar-powered sanitation systems, or composting toilets, which are especially useful in areas with limited access to water or electricity.

- **Focus on Inclusion:** Support inclusive sanitation solutions that address the needs of marginalized women, including women with disabilities, women from low-income communities, and those living in rural or remote areas.

A. Ensuring the Responsibilities of Local Governments in Improving Women's Sanitation –

Local governments (Municipalities, Panchayats, and Urban Local Bodies) play a crucial role in ensuring access to hygienic public toilets for women. Their responsibilities in this regard include:

Planning and Construction of Women-Friendly Sanitation Facilities

- **Infrastructure Development:** Local governments must prioritize building and maintaining separate, clean, and secure toilets for women in public spaces such as markets, bus stands, and public parks. The construction must adhere to safety and hygiene standards, providing necessary features like running water, soap, sanitary bins, and adequate lighting.
- **Ensuring Accessibility:** Public toilets must be easily accessible, especially for women in rural or underserved urban areas. Toilets should be located strategically in areas frequented by women, such as near schools, workplaces, and public transport hubs.
- **Inclusive Design:** Ensure toilets are designed with the safety and needs of women in mind, including features such as separate facilities for menstrual hygiene, ramps for differently-abled women, and proper waste disposal systems.

Maintenance and Monitoring of Public Toilets

- **Regular Maintenance:** Local governments are responsible for ensuring the regular cleaning and upkeep of toilets, ensuring they remain hygienic, well-stocked, and safe to use. This includes regular checks on sanitary bins, plumbing, and accessibility features.
- **Sanitation Workers' Welfare:** Ensure the well-being of workers who maintain public toilets by providing adequate facilities, fair wages, and health benefits. Workers should be trained in handling menstrual hygiene products safely.

Community Engagement and Awareness

- **Public Education Campaigns:** Local bodies should initiate campaigns to raise awareness about menstrual health and hygiene, emphasizing the need for clean and accessible toilets for women. This can include collaborations with schools, women's groups, and NGOs to educate the public.

- **Engage Women in Planning:** Local governments should actively involve women in the planning and monitoring process of public toilets to ensure that their specific needs are addressed. This could be through women's self-help groups (SHGs) or women's representation on local sanitation committees.

Reporting and Accountability Mechanisms

- **Feedback Systems:** Implement systems (apps, surveys, helplines) that allow women and the public to report issues with public toilets, such as poor maintenance, lack of facilities, or safety concerns. Local governments should be responsive to these reports and act promptly.
- **Transparent Budgeting:** Ensure transparency in budget allocation for sanitation projects, especially those focused on women's needs. Public audits of sanitation facilities and services can be used to ensure funds are being used effectively.

But to make sure that they contribute in it, we have to make sure to encourage them by providing some awards and recognitions. Recognizing and rewarding local governments for their efforts in improving women's sanitation can motivate them to prioritize this issue and inspire others to follow suit. Some examples of awards and recognition in this direction are:

1. Swachh Bharat Mission Awards

- Under the **Swachh Bharat Mission**, various awards are given to municipalities, districts, and states that have excelled in sanitation management. Local governments that achieve exceptional progress in providing women-friendly toilets can be recognized with these awards, especially under categories like **Best City (for Urban Sanitation)** or **Best District (for Rural Sanitation)**.
- **Swachh Survekshan Awards:** These are annual rankings and awards given to cities based on their sanitation and hygiene practices. Specific sub-categories like "Best City for Women's Sanitation" or "Best Municipal Corporation for Hygiene and Safety" can encourage local bodies to invest in improving public toilets for women.

2. National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) Awards

- This government initiative focuses on poverty alleviation through improved livelihoods in urban areas. Local governments excelling in improving sanitation, particularly in slums and informal settlements, can be awarded for implementing women-centered sanitation policies, including providing safe public toilets for women.

3. Indira Gandhi Clean Energy Award

- This award recognizes initiatives related to clean energy and sanitation. Local bodies that innovate by using sustainable and environmentally friendly methods for maintaining women's sanitation facilities can be rewarded under this category, such as by using solar-powered toilets or waste-recycling technologies.

4. The Zila Panchayat and Urban Local Body Excellence Award

- State governments can set up awards to recognize the best-performing panchayats and urban local bodies for their efforts in improving sanitation for women. This could include specific categories like "Best Women-Friendly Sanitation Initiative," encouraging local governments to create safe and accessible sanitation options for women.

5. Women's Empowerment Awards

- Various state and national-level awards for women's empowerment can include categories that focus on local government efforts in improving women's health and hygiene. For example, the **Nari Shakti Puraskar** (National Award for Women's Empowerment) could include recognition for local bodies that have made a substantial impact on women's sanitation and menstrual health.

6. CSR Initiatives and Private Sector Recognition

- Local governments can collaborate with private companies and NGOs, who can offer their own awards or CSR funding to incentivize innovative sanitation solutions that benefit women. Recognition in the form of CSR awards or grants could help local bodies receive financial and technological support to improve public sanitation infrastructure.

7. National Sanitation Excellence Award

- A prestigious award recognizing the best-performing states, districts, and local bodies in the country in the field of sanitation, with a special focus on facilities for women, can serve as an incentive for local governments to prioritize the creation and maintenance of hygienic public toilets.

Other Measures to Encourage Local Governments

- **Performance-Based Incentives:** Provide financial incentives or additional funding for local governments that meet specific targets related to improving women's sanitation, such as increasing the number of women-friendly public toilets or achieving high standards of maintenance.
- **Peer Learning and Best Practice Sharing:** Organize forums where high-performing local bodies can share their experiences and strategies. These platforms can serve as a form of recognition and offer learning opportunities for others to replicate successful initiatives.
- **Community Involvement in Award Judging:** Involve the public, particularly women, in judging and voting for local governments that have made outstanding contributions to improving sanitation. This increases the sense of accountability and highlights the real impact on communities.

By combining local government responsibility with rewards and recognition, India can create a robust system that motivates municipalities, panchayats, and urban local bodies to prioritize and improve women's access to hygienic public toilets. This will not only improve sanitation but also contribute to women's health, dignity, and overall empowerment.

8. Conclusion

Addressing the operational and sanitization challenges of public toilets is crucial for enhancing women's health and dignity. By prioritizing flexible access, stringent hygiene practices, and menstrual hygiene management, communities can make substantial progress toward creating gender-inclusive public health infrastructure. Failure to adequately address these concerns not only undermines public health but also hampers the broader goals of gender equality and the fundamental right to a dignified life.

History can be a great light to show the path, in other words, Looking to history can provide valuable insights, as ancient systems of water management and sanitation highlight the importance of community-based efforts in maintaining hygiene. By leveraging new technologies and ensuring the active involvement of local governments, we can create systems that are not only effective but sustainable.

One possible solution is the recruitment of officers specifically dedicated to sanitation and hygiene, Like if we will get them hired as govt officer of sanitation hygiene department it will improvise their respect & value. which could increase community engagement, foster accountability, and create a sense of pride and respect for sanitation roles. Promoting such roles through social platforms would elevate their value and inspire positive changes at the grassroots level.

A future framework for improving public sanitation must be built upon these foundations—combining historical knowledge, modern innovations, and a supportive governance structure. With such a comprehensive approach, we can significantly improve the quality of life for women and ensure that sanitation becomes a vehicle for promoting dignity, equality, and public health across the globe. Failure to address these concerns undermines not only public health but also the broader goals of gender equality and the fundamental right to a dignified life.

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