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VAMBAY FACE A SANITATION CRISIS

LIVING AMID NEGLECT

Residents of Hyderabad's VAMBAY settlement are grappling with critical sanitation issues. The housing project, established in 2007 under the Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojana (VAMBAY), aimed to provide better living conditions for urban slum dwellers. However, poor maintenance over the years has resulted in overflowing sewage, uncollected garbage, and contaminated water supplies, creating an ongoing public health crisis.

The lack of proper sanitation facilities has led to frequent outbreaks of diseases like dengue and malaria. Residents report that water tanks are rarely cleaned, forcing many families to buy drinking water from private suppliers. During the rainy season, the drainage system becomes clogged, causing sewage to flood homes, further exposing residents to unhygienic conditions and increasing health risks.

Although funds for infrastructure upgrades were allocated in 2015-16, they remain unutilized, leaving the settlement in dire straits. Municipal authorities have acknowledged the severity of the situation and pledged to address issues like garbage disposal, water tank cleaning, and drainage repairs. Awareness programs on proper waste management are also being planned to involve residents in improving the settlement's sanitation.



Despite these promises, residents emphasize the urgency of immediate action. Collaborative efforts between local authorities and the community are essential to resolve these issues and provide the VAMBAY residents with the dignity and living conditions they deserve.

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ODISHA EXCELS IN CLEAN WATER

CHALLENGES PERSIST

Odisha has emerged as a leader in clean water and sanitation, achieving a top score of 88 in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6, as per the SDG India Index 2023-24 by NITI Aayog. The state boasts 73% of rural households with piped water connections and 99% accessing improved drinking water. Additionally, Odisha has achieved 100% toilet coverage and open defecation-free status, reflecting significant progress in hygiene and public health.

Despite these achievements, the state struggles with gender equality, scoring a low 39 in SDG 5. The sex ratio stands at 894 females per 1,000 males, far below the national average of 929 and the target of 950. Around 30% of married women report experiencing domestic violence, and only 4% of women own land. Access to technology is limited, with just half of the women possessing mobile phones.

Experts attribute these gaps to a lack of awareness about initiatives targeting women and girls. Human rights activist Biswapriya Kanungo has urged the government to increase efforts to empower women, particularly in rural areas, by addressing gaps in education, employment, and participation in society.

While Odisha's progress in water and sanitation is commendable, addressing its gender inequality is crucial to ensuring holistic development for its



population. The government must not only implement programs but also actively promote them to ensure maximum reach and impact. Equal access to education and technology, along with addressing societal norms that perpetuate inequality, will play a vital role in uplifting women. By closing the gender gap, Odisha can pave the way for a more equitable and sustainable future, ensuring its achievements in one area are complemented by progress in others.

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GURLA'S DIARRHOEA OUTBREAK

COMPREHENSIVE INVESTIGATION

In October 2024, Gurla mandal in Vizianagaram district faced a severe diarrhoea outbreak, prompting the state government to appoint Special Chief Secretary K. Vijayanand to lead an in-depth investigation. During his visit, Vijayanand collaborated with District Collector Dr. BR Ambedkar and officials from the Panchayat Raj, Rural Water Supply, and Medical and Health departments to identify the outbreak's causes and assess the response measures.

Laboratory analyses confirmed bacterial contamination in the village's drinking water. Further examination revealed that 180 out of 918 families lacked proper sanitation facilities, leading to open defecation practices. Additionally, issues such as irregular chlorination of overhead water tanks and potential leaks in the water supply pipelines were identified as contributing factors.

Vijayanand emphasized the necessity for immediate infrastructure improvements, including the replacement of compromised pipelines and the construction of adequate sanitation facilities. He also highlighted the importance of public education on hygiene practices and the regular maintenance of water supply systems to prevent future outbreaks.



This incident underscores the critical need for robust public health infrastructure and proactive measures to ensure the safety and well-being of rural communities.

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DELHI'S UNSUNG HEROES

SANITATION WORKERS' RISKS

In Delhi, sanitation workers face life-threatening conditions daily, often for very low pay. Anil, a worker who cleans sewers at night and manages a public washroom during the day, is exposed to toxic gases while earning only Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000 per task. These hazardous jobs have claimed many lives, leaving families with little more than government compensation to survive.

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Exploitation by contractors further compounds the struggles of sanitation workers. Employers often delay payments, forcing workers into dangerous tasks. For Gangaram, a 67-year-old suffering from tuberculosis, years of exposure to hazardous conditions have taken a heavy toll. Now unable to work, he survives by connecting others to similar jobs and begging for food.



This plight highlights the need for systemic change to protect Delhi's sanitation workers. With little to no safety measures in place, these laborers risk their lives daily. Improved wages, safety protocols, and healthcare support are crucial to ensuring their dignity and survival.

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CLEANER SCHOOLS IN SURAT

INSUFFICIENT ALLOWANCE

In October 2024, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) took a stand in Surat, Gujarat, highlighting the pressing issue of inadequate sanitation in municipal schools. They protested at a school in Lakshman Nagar, emphasizing the need for increased sanitation allowances to ensure a clean and healthy environment for students.

Currently, schools receive a monthly sanitation allowance ranging from Rs 1,300 to Rs 3,800, depending on student numbers. AAP argues that this amount is insufficient for proper maintenance. For instance, School No. 98 receives only Rs 1,400 per month, leading to unclean facilities. Teachers often have to clean the premises themselves due to a lack of funds for sanitation services.

During the protest, AAP members actively cleaned the school's lobby, passages, and grounds to demonstrate the challenges faced by schools with limited sanitation budgets. They have been advocating for increased allowances to ensure students have a healthy study environment.



This movement sheds light on the importance of adequate sanitation in schools, emphasizing that a clean environment is essential for students' health and learning. It also highlights the role of community and political action in addressing such issues, encouraging students to be aware and proactive about the conditions in their educational institutions.

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RISKS OF REUSING PLASTIC BOTTLES

YOUR HEALTH AT RISK

In Bangalore, many people reuse plastic water bottles to save money and reduce waste. At first, this might seem like a smart and eco-friendly habit. But did you know that reusing these bottles can harm your health? Plastic bottles are often made for single use, and using them again can lead to serious health issues. Without proper care, they can turn into breeding grounds for harmful bacteria and even release dangerous chemicals into your water.

Most plastic bottles in Bangalore are made of a material called PET (polyethylene terephthalate). This type of plastic is cheap and convenient but not designed for reuse. Over time, and especially in Bangalore's hot weather, these bottles start breaking down. When this happens, harmful chemicals like antimony and phthalates can mix with your water. These chemicals are linked to serious problems, such as hormone imbalances, developmental issues, and even cancer. Scary, right?

It doesn't stop there. When bottles are reused without proper cleaning, bacteria start to grow inside. Bangalore's warm and humid weather makes it even easier for germs to multiply. These germs can cause stomach infections and other health problems. Even if you rinse the bottle, tiny cracks can form in the plastic, creating spots where bacteria can hide and thrive.



So, what can we do about it? The best solution is to switch to reusable bottles made of safer materials like stainless steel or BPA-free plastic. These bottles are safer, last longer, and are easier to clean. It's also important to wash your bottle thoroughly every day to keep it germ-free. By making these small changes, you can stay healthy, protect the environment, and avoid the risks of reusing plastic bottles. Your health is worth it!