



MAINS iMPACT 2025

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SWACHH BHARAT MISSION

SYLLABUS:

GS 2 > Social Justice >> Welfare Schemes

REFERENCE NEWS:

As per information provided by **MoS for Housing & Urban Affairs, Shri Tokhan Sahu** in Lok Sabha, under **SBM-U 2.0**, Central Share (CS) funds are released to States/UTs based on **approved action plans** for toilet construction, used water management, solid waste management, Information Education Communication, behaviour change and capacity building.

- Plans are approved first by **State Level Technical Committee (SLTC)** and finally by **National Advisory and Review Committee (NARC)**.
- Further instalments depend on **fund utilisation and physical progress**.
- Since **October 2024**, funds are disbursed through the **SNA-Sparsh system** integrating **PFMS, State IFMIS and RBI's e-Kuber**.
- States/UTs have raised **₹811.36 crore** claims so far in 2025–26.
- **CAG** is responsible for auditing government accounts; **no separate audit** is done for SBM-U. Progress monitored through **Utilization Certificates (UCs)**. Of **₹6,876 crore** released under SBM-U 2.0, UCs for **₹2,029.09 crore** received.
- **Mechanised Road Sweepers (MRS) Initiative: 152 cities** (NCAP + >5 lakh population ULBs) eligible for additional central assistance. **113 cities** submitted plans for **580 MRS units** costing **₹323 crore**, with **₹96 crore** central share approved.

SWACHH BHARAT MISSION:

Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is India's national sanitation campaign launched on **2 October 2014** to eliminate open defecation, improve solid and liquid waste management, and drive behaviour change around sanitation across rural and urban India. It is implemented through two parallel streams:

- **SBM Grameen (Rural)** led by the **Ministry of Jal Shakti / Department of Drinking Water & Sanitation**; focused on household toilets, sustaining ODF gains, and comprehensive Solid & Liquid Waste Management (SLWM). Phase-II (2020–21 to 2024–25) shifts emphasis from construction to sustainability (ODF Plus/ODF++).
- **SBM Urban** overseen by the **Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs**; focused on making cities **garbage-free** through 100% door-to-door collection, source segregation, scientific processing, remediation of dumpsites and advancing cities to ODF+ / ODF++ under **SBM-U 2.0** (launched Oct 2021).

OBJECTIVES OF SBM:

- Eliminate open defecation (ODF) and ensure access to safe sanitation for all households.
- Move beyond toilets to **sustained behaviour change**, faecal-sludge and sewage management, and full lifecycle waste processing (circular economy).
- Improve public health, women's safety and environmental quality by reducing exposure to unsafe human waste.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF SBM:**Historic Expansion in Sanitation Coverage**

- Rural sanitation coverage increased from **38.7% in 2014** to **100% ODF status by 2019** (official DDWS data).
- Over **11 crore household toilets** have been constructed under SBM-G.
- **85% of villages** have now achieved **ODF Plus** status (Phase-II progress, 2024).
- States leading in ODF Plus villages: **Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh.**
- All statutory towns have been declared **ODF**, and a growing number have progressed to **ODF+ and ODF++** categories.
- Over **73 lakh individual household toilets** and **6.2 lakh community/public toilets** constructed (MoHUA data).

Major Public Health Improvements

- **WHO (2019)** estimated SBM helped avert **300,000 diarrhoeal deaths** due to improved sanitation.
- **Nature study (2021)** estimated **60,000–70,000 fewer infant deaths every year (2014–2020)** due to improved sanitation and reduced open defecation.

Groundwater contamination decline

- A **UN study** reported a **12.7-fold decrease** in groundwater contamination risk in ODF regions, especially critical in **Punjab and West Bengal**, where groundwater is the primary drinking water source.

Significant Economic Benefits for Households

- **UNICEF (2018)**: Families in ODF villages saved **₹50,000 per household per year** due to lower medical expenses, fewer days lost to illness, higher productivity. These savings were most notable in **Uttar Pradesh** and **Madhya Pradesh**.

Solid Waste Management Transformation (Urban)

- Urban waste processing increased from **17% in 2014** → **75% in 2023**.
- As of 2025 (PIB): **80.31%** of total municipal solid waste is **processed daily**, up from **16%** in 2014.

Infrastructure creation

- **7,783** solid waste processing facilities established MRFs, Composting plants, Biogas/biomethanation units, Construction & Demolition waste plants, Waste-to-energy plants

Dumpsite remediation

- **2,478 dumpsites** identified; **25.04 crore MT** of waste targeted for remediation.
- **1,096 dumpsites fully remediated, 986 under progress.**
- **15.20 crore MT (61%)** of legacy waste processed.
- **7,903 acres** of land reclaimed.

Behavioural Change Revolution

- Campaigns like **Swachhata Hi Seva, Darwaza Bandh**, and massive IEC drives shifted public attitudes.
- SBM's success lies not only in construction but in **changing norms around sanitation**, especially in rural India.

Women's safety & dignity

- **93% of women** reported feeling **safer** with access to household toilets (UNICEF study).
- Reduction in risks associated with open defecation, especially at night.

Societal and Environmental Gains

- **Cleaner public and tourist spaces:** Under **Swachh Iconic Places**, sanitation and cleanliness have improved at **Taj Mahal, Ghats of Varanasi, Vaishno Devi, Kamakhya Temple**, etc.

Improved urban air quality

- Mechanised sweepers introduced in **152 cities**, with **580 sweepers** approved (2025) to reduce dust pollution.

International Recognition

- Praised by **WHO, UN, World Bank**, and global leaders like **Bill Gates** and **Ratan Tata**.
- SBM is globally seen as the **largest behaviour-change sanitation campaign** in human history.

Positive Impact on Cultural Mindset and Civic Responsibility

- Participation from schools, panchayats, NGOs, celebrities, and corporates through **Swachh Bharat Kosh**.
- Cities like **Indore, Surat, Mysuru** topped cleanliness rankings, motivating nationwide competition.

CHALLENGES TO SBM:

- **Quality and Sustainability Issues in Toilet Construction: CAG Report (2020)** found instances of poor-quality toilet construction; many were **non-functional**, lacked water supply, or were not durable. Several toilets were **unused or used as storage rooms**, affecting ODF sustainability.
 - Studies in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan show **toilet abandonment** due to lack of water, poor design, and absence of pits/septic systems.
 - CAG Audit (2020), independent surveys by Research Institute for Compassionate Economics (RICE), Ministry of Jal Shakti review notes.
- **Incomplete Faecal Sludge and Wastewater Management:** Large gaps remain between toilet construction and **safe disposal/treatment of faecal sludge**. In many peri-urban and rural areas, septic tanks are emptied by **manual scavengers**, and sludge is dumped in open drains or water bodies.

- **Only 40% of urban India** has access to proper sewerage; the rest depend on on-site systems that are poorly managed.
- **Solid Waste Management Challenges:** Despite progress, **over 20–25% of India’s urban waste remains unprocessed** (2023–24 data). **Source segregation** remains low (less than 60% average), making downstream processing inefficient.
 - **Waste-to-energy plants** underperform: many operate below capacity or shut down due to poor waste quality (e.g., Delhi Okhla plant, Pune plant issues).
- **Behavioural Barriers & Cultural Norms:** Toilet access ≠ toilet use. Surveys show **continued open defecation** in pockets of rural India despite ODF declarations.
 - RICE studies (2018, 2021): 20–23% rural population still defecates in the open.
 - Among children (<15 years), **open defecation rates are highest**, due to beliefs of “cleanliness” or habit.
 - Some households treat toilets as “impure” spaces due to caste and cultural norms.
- **Water Supply Constraints:** Nearly **42.5% rural households** lacked adequate water supply for toilets (SBM-G Phase-II baseline).
 - Water scarcity in Rajasthan, Bundelkhand, and parts of Maharashtra leads to **toilet non-usage**. Urban slums with intermittent water supply face similar issues.
- **Caste-linked Sanitation Work & Social Inequity:** Manual scavenging persists despite legal bans, especially in septic tank cleaning, sewer maintenance
 - Outsourcing of sanitation to private contractors often results in **Dalit workers doing hazardous sanitation work** without safety gear as per National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) reports and Supreme Court observations (2023)
- **Urban Governance & Human Resource Shortages:** Severe lack of **sanitation inspectors** and municipal capacity.
 - **Shimla Municipal Corporation (2024)** had only *5 sanitation inspectors for 34 wards* and many ULBs in India have *zero* trained sanitation engineers as per Himachal Pradesh HC affidavit (2024).
- **Overemphasis on Targets vs. Long-term Sustainability:** Early SBM years focused heavily on **toilet construction numbers**, resulting in poor quality, neglected behaviour change and insufficient waste treatment infrastructure. Rural households often lack support for pit emptying, maintenance, upgradation to ODF Plus standards
- **Technology and Waste Infrastructure Failures:** Large, capital-intensive technologies, WTE plants, large biogas units, mechanical sweepers often fail due to bad waste segregation, high operational costs and poor maintenance.
 - Cities like Delhi, Chennai, and Bengaluru have repeatedly struggled with **landfill fires**, showing gaps in scientific waste management.
- **Privatization Concerns and Inefficiencies:** Mechanised sweeping machines costing **₹1–2 crore each** are often under-utilised, operated without proper planning and maintained poorly. Privatization sometimes leads to high expenditure, poor accountability and continued caste-based sanitation roles
- **Uneven Performance Across States:** Wealthier states like **Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Gujarat** show smaller gains in **actual toilet usage** compared to poorer states. Urban-rural, inter-state and intra-state disparities remain (NFHS-5 data)
- **Environmental Concerns:** Improper disposal of faecal sludge and sewage leads to river pollution, groundwater contamination and higher antimicrobial resistance risks. Overflowing landfills continue to emit methane and leachate despite SBM-U 2.0 goals.

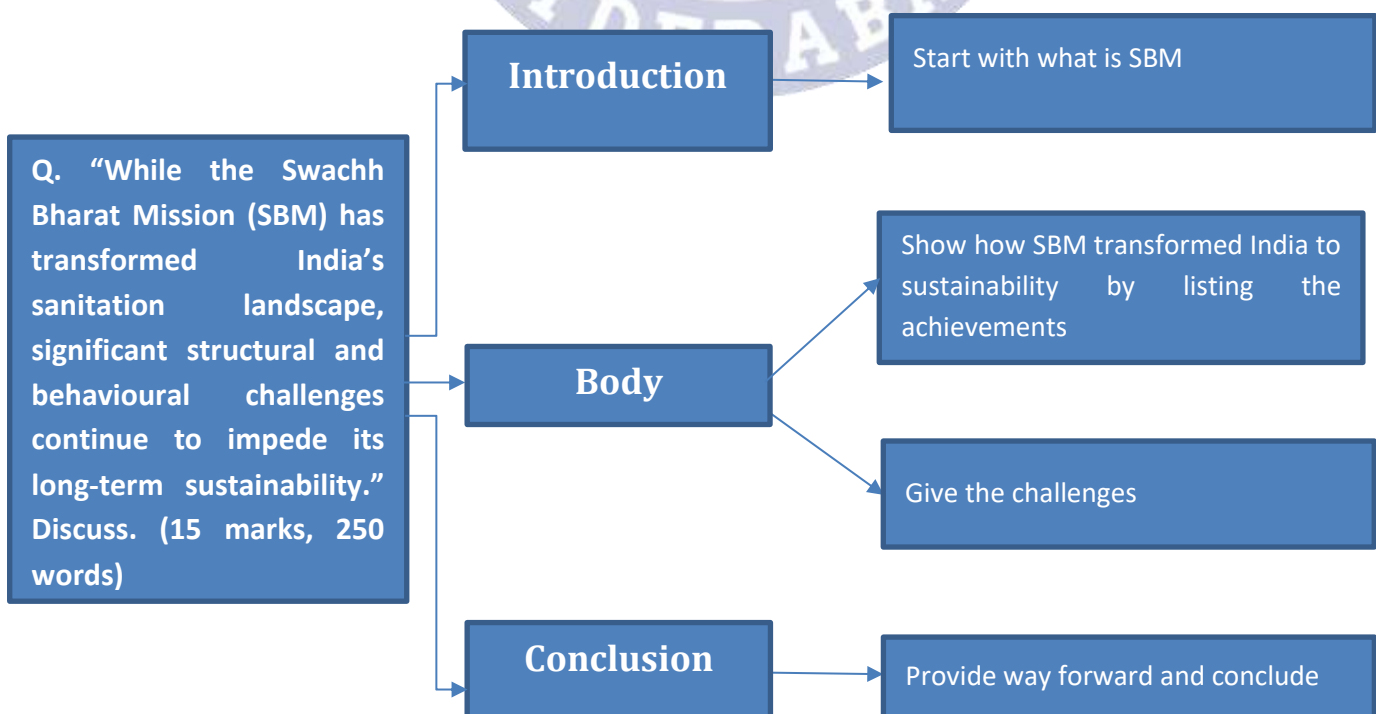
WAY FORWARD:

- **Holistic and Integrated Approach:** Transition from a primarily construction-focused approach to a holistic model that includes robust waste management systems, sustainable practices, and comprehensive public health initiatives.
 - Integrating SBM with other development programs like Jal Jeevan Mission will provide a more coordinated and effective approach to sanitation and water availability.
- **Decentralization and Community Participation:** Encourage decentralized, community-driven efforts that empower local bodies and communities to manage and sustain sanitation facilities. This involves strengthening community engagement through awareness programs and involving local stakeholders in the planning and execution of sanitation projects.
- **Behavioural Change and Education:** Amplify efforts in behaviour change communication to address cultural and social barriers to toilet use. Educational campaigns should focus on the benefits of proper sanitation practices, aiming to shift long-standing perceptions and habits.
- **Technological Innovations and Infrastructure Quality:** Invest in research and development of cost-effective, low-maintenance sanitation technologies that are suitable for diverse geographical and cultural contexts of India. Addressing the quality issues in toilet construction to ensure durability and usability is critical.
- **Enhanced Monitoring and Accountability:** Strengthen monitoring mechanisms to ensure the functionality and maintenance of sanitation infrastructure. Implement regular audits, increase the number of sanitation inspectors, and utilize technology for real-time monitoring to enhance transparency and accountability.
- **Addressing Social Inequities:** Tackle caste-based and socioeconomic disparities in sanitation access and usage head-on. Policies should aim to be inclusive, ensuring that vulnerable and marginalized communities are not only beneficiaries but also active participants in sanitation initiatives.

PRACTICE QUESTION:

Q. “While the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) has transformed India’s sanitation landscape, significant structural and behavioural challenges continue to impede its long-term sustainability.” Discuss. (15 marks, 250 words)

APPROACH:



Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is India's national sanitation campaign launched in **2014** to eliminate open defecation, improve solid and liquid waste management, and drive behaviour change around sanitation across rural and urban India.

SBM transforming India to Sustainability

- **Near-universal sanitation access:** Rural sanitation coverage rose from **38.7% (2014)** to **100% ODF (2019)**; **11 crore toilets** built; **85% villages ODF Plus**. Urban India has constructed **73 lakh IHHLs** and **6.2 lakh public/community toilets**.
- **Solid waste management transformation:** Urban waste processing improved from **17% (2014)** to **75% (2023)** and **80.31% (2025)** with **7,783 waste-processing facilities** operational.
- **Legacy dumpsite remediation:** **1,096 dumpsites** remediated, **15.20 crore MT (61%)** legacy waste processed; **7,903 acres** land reclaimed.
- **Public health impacts:** WHO estimates **300,000 fewer diarrhoeal deaths**; studies show **60,000–70,000 fewer infant deaths annually (2014–20)**.
- **Women's safety:** **93% women** report feeling safer due to household toilets.

Challenges Impeding SBM's Sustainability

- **Poor quality construction & non-usage:** CAG (2020) found toilets unusable or repurposed for storage; lack of water and weak designs undermine ODF outcomes.
- **Faecal sludge & wastewater gaps:** Only **40% urban India** has sewerage; sludge often dumped in drains, exposing workers manual scavenging persists.
- **Behavioural barriers:** **20–23% rural households** still defecate in the open; toilet usage among children remains low due to cultural norms.
- **Solid waste management gaps:** **20–25% waste remains unprocessed**; WtE plants underperform; segregation below 60%.
- **Administrative weaknesses:** Severe shortage of sanitation inspectors (e.g., **Shimla had only 5 for 34 wards**).
- **Privatization & social inequities:** Outsourcing sanitation reinforces caste-based roles; mechanised sweepers underutilised.

Way Forward

- **Move from construction to sustainability:** Prioritise **ODF Plus/ODF++** outcomes by ensuring water availability, pit emptying mechanisms, and faecal sludge management systems.
- **Strengthen Faecal Sludge & Wastewater Management:** Develop low-cost FSM infrastructure in all towns <1 lakh population, ensure safe septic tank cleaning through mechanisation, and integrate with AMRUT and Jal Jeevan Mission.
- **Deepen Behaviour Change Communication:** Address cultural norms, myths about toilet use, and continued open defecation among children through targeted community campaigns.
- **Build municipal & panchayat capacity:** Recruit more sanitation inspectors, train local engineers, and empower ULBs and Gram Panchayats with funds and technology for decentralised waste management.

- **Improve waste segregation & processing:** Scale up source segregation, material recovery facilities, recycling, and composting while avoiding over-dependence on capital-intensive technologies like WtE plants.
- **Address social inequities:** Eliminate manual scavenging through complete mechanisation, ensure worker safety, and prevent caste-linked exploitation in sanitation services.
- **Promote convergence & integrated sanitation planning:** Link SBM with **Jal Jeevan Mission, AYUSHMAN Bharat, Smart Cities Mission, and National Clean Air Programme** for environment–health synergy.

To secure long-term gains, SBM must shift from a construction-driven approach to a **holistic sanitation ecosystem** grounded in reliable water supply, effective faecal sludge management, decentralised waste systems, robust municipal capacity, and deeper behaviour change. Addressing social inequities and integrating SBM with programmes like Jal Jeevan Mission will be essential to achieving universal, sustainable sanitation.

