

63rd Commission on Status of Women

**Remarks by
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Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations**

Empowerment of women and girls through access to public services, including Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

**Ex-Press Bar
UNHQ**

March 14, 2019

*H.E. Ambassador Burhan Gafoor,
Excellencies from Cameroon, South Africa and Norway*

Distinguished guests

1. We are pleased to join Permanent Missions of Singapore, Norway and South Africa to the United Nations in New York in convening this important discussion under the umbrella of the CSW.
2. Women are important stakeholders in water supply, hygiene and sanitation due to the roles they play in the management and use of water and sanitation. Women also disproportionately bear the impact of inadequate water and sanitation facilities and services.
3. Limited sanitation facilities and lack of privacy are linked to high drop-out rates for school girls. Mainstreaming requirement of girls in school hygiene and sanitation and providing separate sanitation facilities and washrooms that offer privacy and ease of access ensures that girls stay in school longer and reduce the risk of sexual harassment.
4. Mahatma Gandhi once said "We can no more gain God's blessing with an unclean body than with an unclean mind. A clean body cannot reside in an unclean city." It is Mahatma Gandhi's vision that inspired the launch of the Clean India Mission in 2014 with the objective of making India open defecation free by 2 October 2019, which also coincides with the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
5. Since the launch of Clean India Mission, the number of people practicing open defecation in India has gone down from 550 million in 2014, to less than 150 million today placing India on track to achieve open defecation free (ODF) status by end of 2019, as reflected in SDG 6.2, more than a whole decade ahead of target year of 2030.

6. This could not have been possible without the support of the nearly five-hundred thousand community "motivators" who have encouraged people to use the nearly 90 million household toilets that have been built in rural areas. Women's leadership and agency has played a critical role in this context. Women have also been trained to design and build toilet systems which has led to creation of jobs.

7. India's WASH initiatives are increasingly integrated with public health issues with an emphasis on handwashing and providing cleanliness of facilities especially in schools.

8. Menstrual Hygiene Management is also an important component of the Clean India Mission. Promotion of awareness about menstrual health management among girls and women and their families and introducing low cost, locally appropriate simple solutions have seen success.

9. India's experience with the Clean India Mission has offered us a few lessons:

- Without the motivation for safe sanitation, the newly created facilities will not be used consistently.
- Demand creation must precede physical implementation.
- The focus must be on regular use of the sanitation facilities.
- Institutional and management arrangements need to be in place with emphasis on education, training, participation and maintenance.
- Most importantly, representation of women in management of water and sanitation facilities and monitoring are crucial to ensure sustainability of achievements in this area.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. We are confident that our global aspiration of ensuring that all people have access to safe sanitation by 2030 can be achieved through "4 Ps" Political Leadership, Public Funding, Partnerships, and People's Participation, with women's agency and leadership at its core.

11. I thank everyone for their attention. We look forward to hear from the expert briefers on the panel.