



A Tale of Transformation: Safeda Basti's Journey to Swachhata

Celebrating the Impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission in Elevating Communities and Restoring Dignity

(Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs)

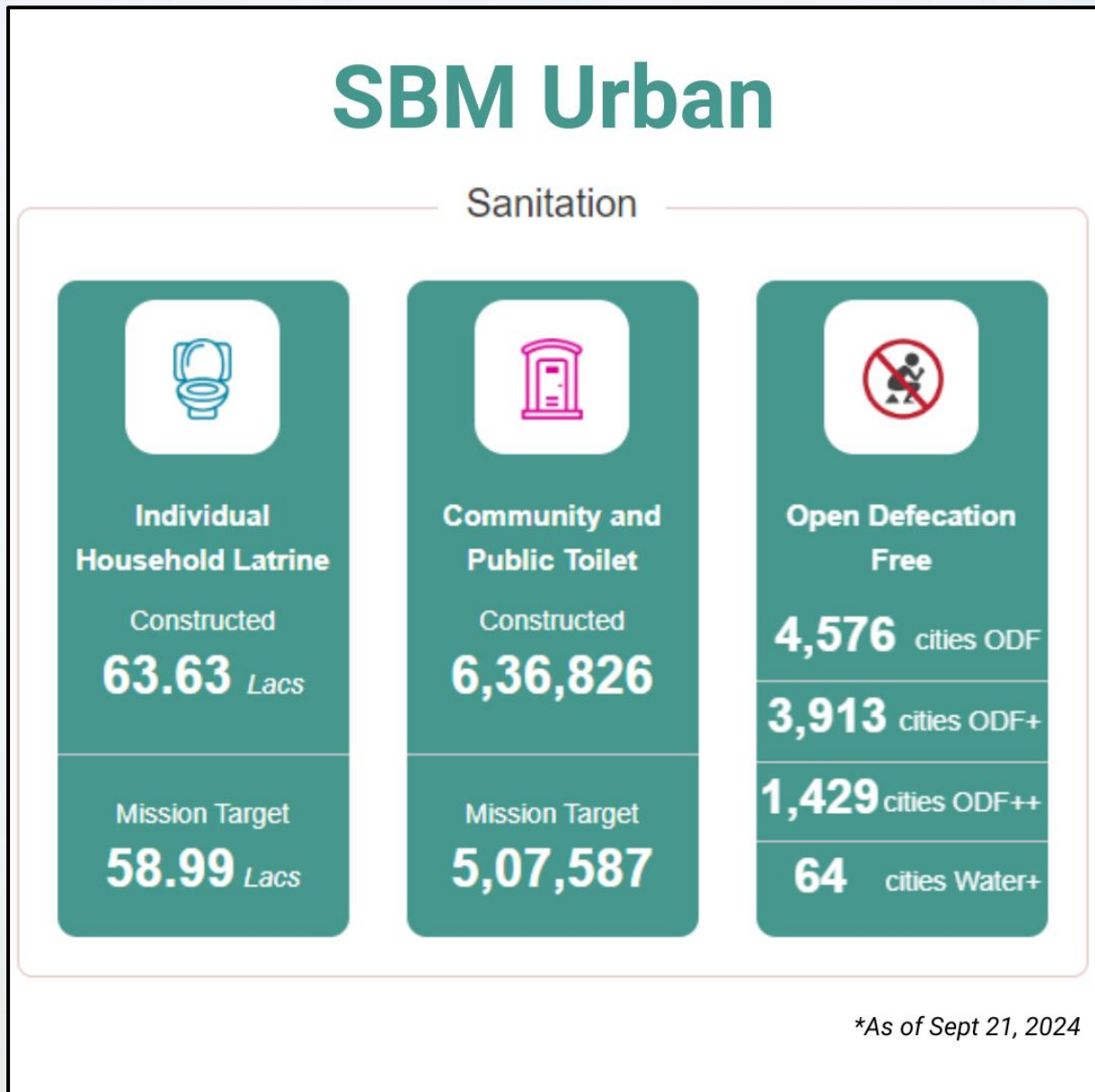
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In the heart of East Delhi lies Safeda Basti, a small informal settlement where the daily struggles of unsafe sanitation once defined life for its 350 households. For years, the community's only option was a single, poorly maintained public toilet that frequently broke down, sometimes remaining unusable for days. This left residents, particularly women and girls, vulnerable. Forced into open defecation in nearby fields or alleys, they faced constant harassment and the looming threat of violence. Beyond the immediate dangers, the lack of sanitation took a toll on women's health, leading to recurrent infections and illnesses, which directly impacted their ability to work and support their families. Fear, discomfort, and the risk to safety became part of daily life in Safeda Basti, leaving families desperate for a solution.

In 2014, thanks to the intervention of the NGO Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE), the people of Safeda Basti began a transformative journey. Through extensive mobilization efforts, the community organized itself into the Safeda Operation and Maintenance Group. Men and women alike began setting up savings accounts, contributing financially towards the installation of a new sewer line. A Toilet Savings Group was also established, allowing each household to gradually pay into a flexible fund, making this critical infrastructure a shared effort.



Over time, 96 household toilets were built and connected to the city’s sewer system. This simple intervention did more than eliminate the practice of open defecation—it empowered the community, restored dignity, and led to cleaner streets and open drains. The women, no longer preoccupied with health concerns or the dangers posed by unsafe sanitation, could return to work. Family incomes rose as a result, and the settlement witnessed an increase in solidarity, particularly among the women who had worked to make the change possible.



Safeda Basti’s transformation reflects the broader story of India’s ambitious **Swachh Bharat Mission**, which, over the last decade, has aimed to address similar challenges across the country. As the mission marks its 10th anniversary, its goals find fresh resonance through the **Swabhav Swachhata Sanskaar Swachhata (4S)** campaign. Launched to commemorate the milestone, this campaign runs from September 17 to October 2, 2024, aligning with the annual **Swachhata Hi Seva** movement and culminating on **Swachh Bharat Diwas**—Mahatma Gandhi’s birth anniversary. For the people of Safeda Basti, however, this change began years ago, when the community, empowered and mobilized, embarked on a journey that reshaped their daily lives.

Since its launch in 2014, the Swachh Bharat Mission has drastically transformed sanitation standards across India, especially in urban areas. Under the **Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban)**, more than **63.63 lakh Individual Household Latrines (IHHL)** have been constructed, providing dignity and security to millions of families, much like those in Safeda Basti. Additionally, over **6.36 lakh community and public toilets** have been built, ensuring that sanitation facilities are accessible to everyone, especially those living in densely populated urban slums. India has now achieved **Open Defecation Free (ODF)** status in **4,576 cities**, while **3,913 cities** have been declared **ODF+** and **1,429 cities** have achieved **ODF++** status, marking sustained improvements in urban sanitation and hygiene.

As India marks the 10th anniversary of the Swachh Bharat Mission, Safeda Basti stands as a powerful testament to the transformative potential of community-driven change and government support. What started as a desperate need for safe sanitation grew into a movement that restored dignity and strengthened the community. The *Swabhav Swachhata Sanskaar Swachhata (4S) campaign* embodies this spirit, reminding us that true progress extends beyond infrastructure—it lies in collective responsibility and a shift in mindset. Safeda Basti's journey mirrors the larger sanitation revolution sweeping India, proving that real change happens when communities come together, take ownership of their future, and ensure that every citizen can live with dignity, safety, and the opportunity for a better life. This success story illustrates how even the most marginalized can lead the charge in building a cleaner, healthier nation.

References:

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Santosh Kumar/ Sarla Meena/ Saurabh Kalia