



Driving Cleanliness: Sanju Devi's Journey to Sanitation in Patna

How One Woman's Courage Transforms Sanitation and Gender Roles in Her Community

(Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs)

September 24, 2024

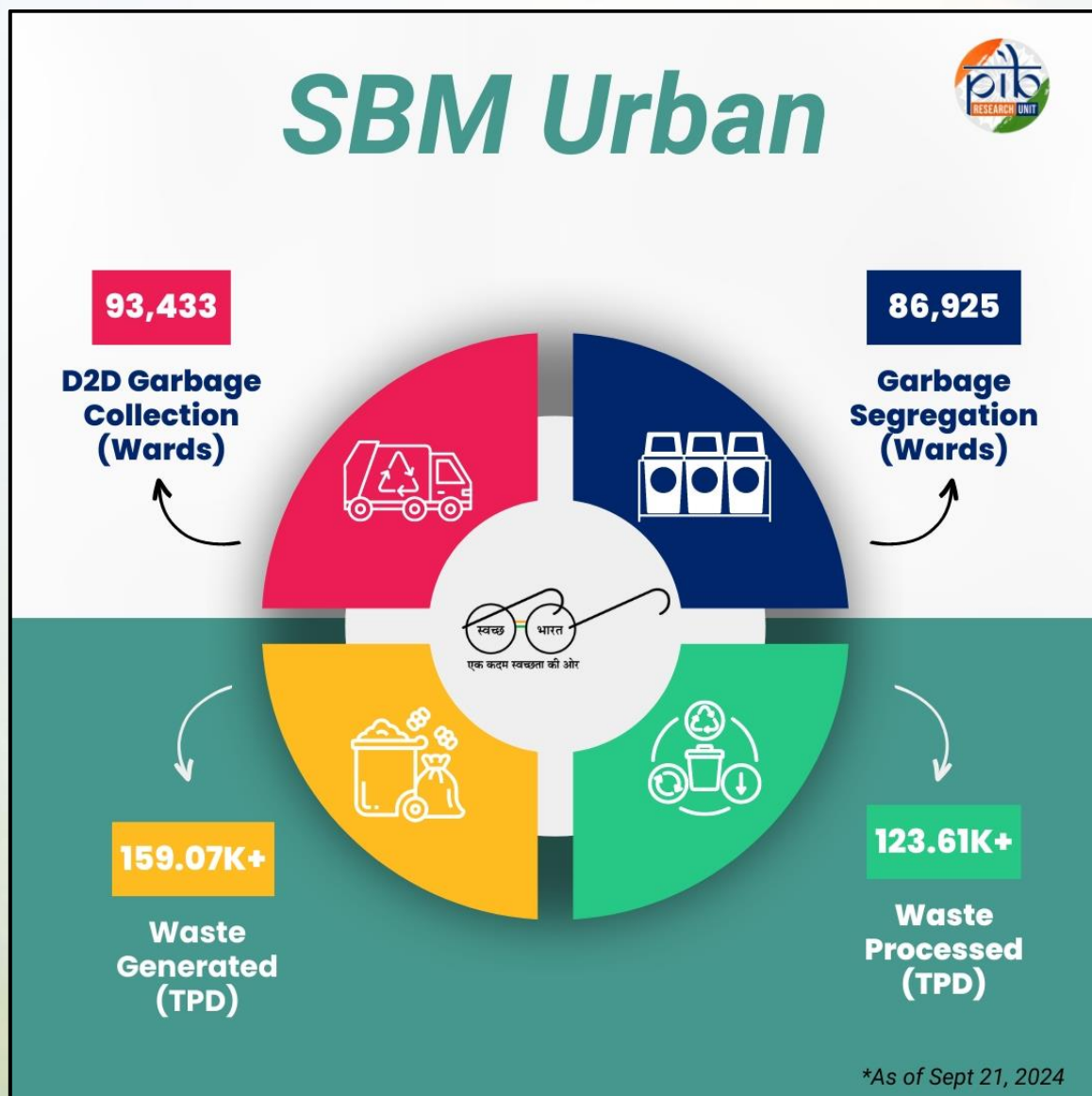
In the bustling city of Patna, where the streets often bear witness to the challenges of waste management, Sanju Devi has emerged as a beacon of change. A resident of Bihar, Sanju's journey began with a simple yet profound desire to contribute to her community's cleanliness. Faced with the daily realities of open dumping and public littering, she recognized that change starts with individuals taking action. But Sanju's story is not just about sanitation; it's also about defying societal norms and reshaping gender roles in a predominantly male-oriented environment.



Initially sceptical about the prospect of driving an e-rickshaw, Sanju was confronted by both her own fears and the disapproval of those around her. The idea of a woman behind the wheel was foreign in her community, but she decided to take that first step. With the support of the Patna Municipal Corporation, Sanju underwent training, empowering herself with the skills needed to navigate both the vehicle and the streets. As she mastered driving, she simultaneously took on the responsibility of door-to-door garbage collection, significantly contributing to the city's waste management efforts.

Sanju's commitment to the sanitation drive not only improved her own life but also sparked a movement among other women in her community. Witnessing her determination and newfound independence, many were inspired to join her. Together, they began to challenge gender stereotypes and redefine their roles in society. The good salaries provided by the Corporation offered these women financial stability, enabling them to support their families and achieve a sense of security and empowerment that had previously seemed out of reach.

Sanju's transformative journey is not an isolated success story; it embodies the very spirit of the **Swachh Bharat Mission**, which aims to create a garbage-free nation by tackling issues like open waste dumping, public littering, and inadequate waste management infrastructure. Her grassroots initiative exemplifies how individual actions can contribute to broader national goals. As the mission celebrates its 10th anniversary, it finds renewed energy in the **Swabhav Swachhata Sanskaar Swachhata (4S)** campaign, running from September 17 to October 2, 2024. This campaign aligns with the annual **Swachhata Hi Seva** tradition and culminates on **Swachh Bharat Diwas**, Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary, highlighting the critical role of community involvement in driving effective sanitation efforts across the country.



As of now, the efforts have resulted in significant advancements in waste management across various wards. The door-to-door (D2D) garbage collection initiative has been implemented in 93,433 wards, with segregation taking place in 86,925 wards. The total waste generated has reached over 159.07K tons per day, with 123.6K tons processed daily, showcasing the substantial progress made towards a cleaner environment. Additionally, as part of the Swachh Survekshan Survey 2023, an impressive 88% of urban areas were found to be free of "Red Spots," indicating a marked reduction in spitting in both commercial and residential areas.

Sanju's story is a powerful reminder of how one individual's small step can catalyse cascading change in a community. By breaking through barriers and stepping into roles traditionally reserved for men, she has not only transformed her own life but also inspired countless other women to join the movement. Sanju Devi stands as a symbol of hope and resilience, proving that with determination and support, it is possible to reshape the narrative around women's roles and responsibilities in society. As the Swachh Bharat Mission continues to push forward, it is stories like Sanju's that will fuel the movement towards a cleaner, more equitable India for all.

References:

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Santosh Kumar/ Sarla Meena / Saurabh Kalia