

Budget 2018: What is missing in Rural Sanitation?

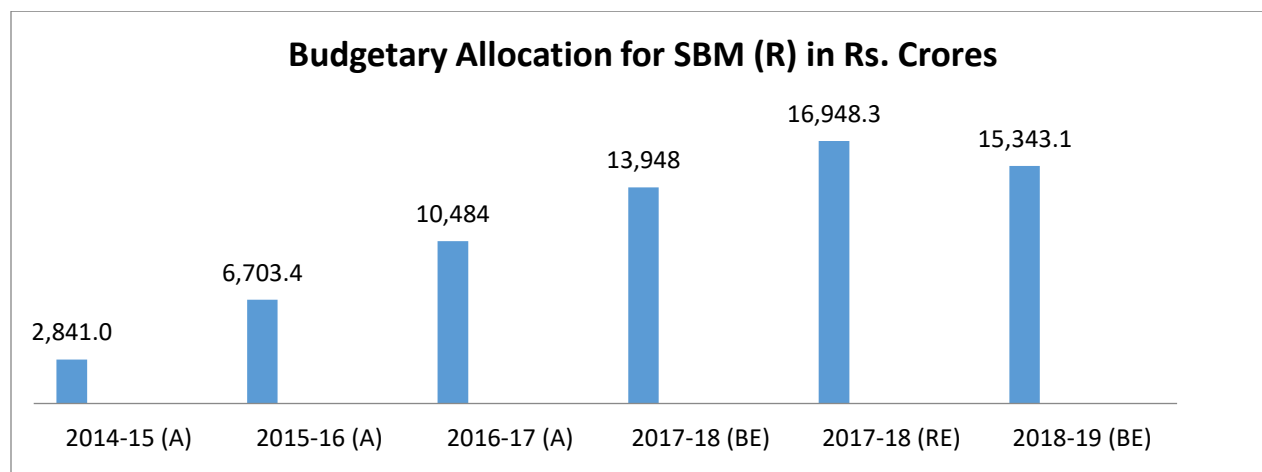
Budget 2018-19 was much anticipated for the rural water and sanitation sector especially since this is the last year of the five-year term of the current government. Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), the much talked about national sanitation programme, is a flagship programme of the current government, which unlike earlier sanitation programmes includes urban sanitation within its scope, has invested more in sanitation than earlier programmes and has tremendous political backing. Surprisingly, the allocations have been reduced by around 7 percent overall for rural water and sanitation in 2018-19 (BE) from the previous year. Compared to Rs. 24,011 crores that the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation¹ (MDWS) received in 2017-18 (RE), it has received Rs.22,357 crores in 2018-19 (BE). The Ministry received Rs. 15,343 crores for the rural sanitation programme and Rs.7,000 crores towards the rural water programme.

Lauding the progress made in the ambitious Swachh Bharat Mission, the Finance Minister in his 2018 Budget speech on 1st February'18 announced the government's plans to construct around 2 crore (20 million) toilets, he claimed 6 crore (60 million) have been already constructed under this mission. Towards the resolve of making the country's villages *swachh* (clean) and aiming to improve the life of its villagers, a new scheme called Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources *Dhan* (GOBAR-DHAN) was also announced². This scheme is meant to address the solid- liquid waste management problem in villages by converting cattle dung and solid waste in farms to compost, fertiliser, bio-gas and bio-CNG. One is yet to see how this translates on ground.

Are there enough funds for rural sanitation?

With more than double the allocation since 2010, the MDWS of the Government of India is on a roll, however, are funds still enough for rural water supply and sanitation?

Fig 1: Budgetary Allocation for SBM (R) in Rs. Crores



Source: Compiled by CBGA from Expenditure Budget Vol. 1 and 2, Union Budget, various years, GoI

¹The MDWS is the nodal agency involved in funding the Swachh Bharat Mission for rural sanitation and the National Rural Drinking Water Programme for rural drinking water.

² <http://www.indiabudget.gov.in/ub2018-19/bs/bs.pdf>

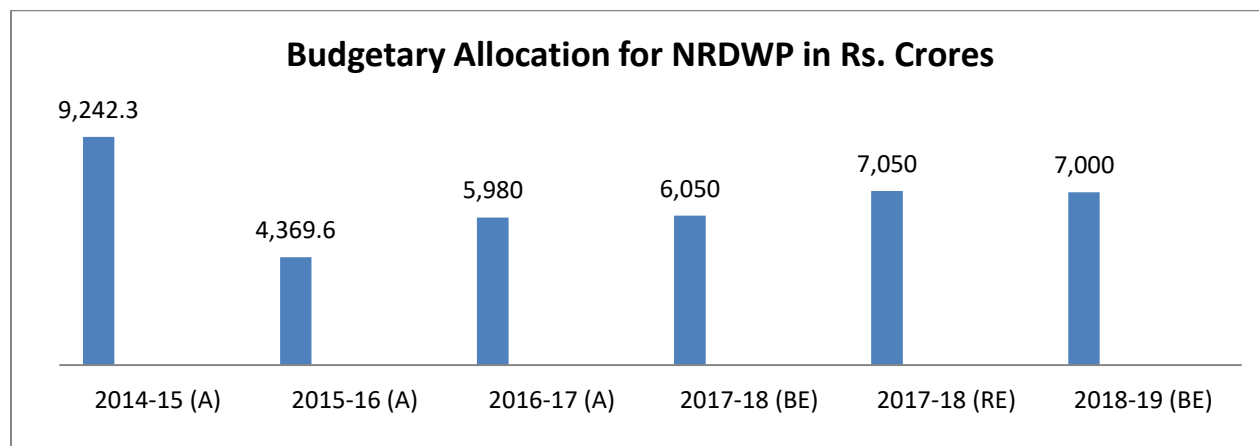
Note:

A – Actuals (expenditure made), BE – Budget Estimates (budget allocated at beginning of the financial year), RE – Revised Estimates (mid-year budget revisions in allocation)

There are enough reasons to cheer for the SBM(R) programme, as evident from government reports and coverage data, however, the Standing Committee on Rural Development had repeatedly pointed out that there is a shortfall in funds for the programme to meet its goal by 2019. The 2016 Report³ stated that the funding to the programme should be “suitably enhanced in a big way.” In fact, the Ministry had demanded Rs. 25,000 crores for the year 2017-18, but only received Rs. 14,000 crores for the 2017-18 budget year. Hence, one wonders why instead of increasing the fund allocation for the rural sanitation programme, it was in fact reduced to Rs. 15,343 crores in 2018-19 BE from Rs. 16,948 in 2017-18 RE⁴ (Fig 1).

The issues surrounding rural sanitation do not just stop at meeting toilet construction targets but also on sustainability and usage. With the gradual reduction of budgets in the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) (Fig 2.), how sustainable will sanitation be without water? The preference for large containment structures continues to persist leading to the overall cost of toilet construction becoming higher than the subsidy amount of Rs. 12,000. Will the reduced budget be able to make up the resource gap that the Ministry is facing?

Fig 2: Budgetary Allocation for NRDWP in Rs. Crores



Source: Compiled by CBGA from Expenditure Budget Vol. 1 and 2, Union Budget, various years, GoI

Surely, the sustainability of the impact of the national sanitation programme (SBM-R) cannot be seen in isolation to the water programme (NRDWP), as water for sanitation is a key enabler/disabler in the uptake of toilet usage in India. Hence the reduced budgets would be negatively impacted with the reduction in allocation. Higher allocations in this year's budget for the rural sanitation programme should have been made mainly because the ambitious target of making the country open defecation free by 2019 would not be possible without stepping up funding.

“We barely manage water for domestic use, water for toilet would increase our burden to collect more water. For open defecation we use 1 litre, for using a toilet we will need atleast 5 litres of water.”

Self Help Group members in Arjipalli, Odisha

³http://164.100.47.193/lssccommittee/Rural%20Development/16_Rural_Development_35.pdf

⁴<http://www.cbgaindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Of-Hits-and-Misses-Analysis-of-Union-Budget-2018-19.pdf>