



# Female-friendly public and community toilets in India



A quick guide for planners and decision makers

Based on the global guide 'Female-friendly public and community toilets' developed by WaterAid, UNICEF and WSUP, this brief guide has been developed by WaterAid India to help state and urban local bodies in India to understand the requirements that women and girls have from public and community toilets, and address those requirements in city planning and local level implementation. This would help in making public and community toilets more accessible to women and girls, including vulnerable groups like girl children, pregnant women, older women and women with disabilities.

## Introduction: the need for female-friendly toilets

Sanitation is recognised as a human right and is included in the Sustainable Development Goals, aiming to achieve universal access to sanitation, while paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

However, public and community toilets<sup>1</sup> are inadequate in number and are not being planned, designed or managed in a way that ensures they are female-friendly and accessible to all users. For instance, a 2017 study by ActionAid India showed that 35% of 229 surveyed public toilets in Delhi did not have a separate section for women. Further, 53% of women's toilets did not have running water and 45% toilets did not have a mechanism to lock the door from inside. Women and girls have different sanitation requirements than men and boys due to both biological factors (menstruation, pregnancy etc) and due to their assigned roles and power dynamics in society (expectations of 'dignity and modesty', greater risks of harassment and sexual violence, responsibilities as main caregivers etc).

<sup>1</sup> Community toilets are sanitation facilities for the shared use of a defined group of local residents as their main toilet facility, typically located in slums or informal settlements, where individual household toilets are scarce. Public toilets are sanitation facilities aimed primarily at people working in or passing through a public space or activity areas such as parks, markets, bus stands, tourist places, etc.



## Female-friendly public and community toilets



**Figure 1:** A public toilet in Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh

**Credit:** WSUP

Therefore, where public or community toilets are either not adequate in number, or disregard women's basic requirements, this restricts the movement and productivity of women and girls and affects their ability to lead and participate in community and public life. Women with disabilities face additional disadvantages, as most toilets do not ensure accessibility, safety, privacy and other special needs.

A few recent initiatives taken in this regard include the launch of female-friendly toilets in Hyderabad, Delhi and Pune; free/paid access to toilets in restaurants and hotels in Bangalore and South Delhi for public, and Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs' *SBM (U) Toilet Locator*<sup>2</sup> android application.

In order to promote universal access to sanitation and attain ODF+ status<sup>3</sup> as per the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban program guidelines, such efforts need to be scaled up in all urban local bodies.

This quick guide is a summary of the global guide on 'Female-friendly public and community toilets' by WaterAid, UNICEF and WSUP, adapted to the Indian context by including design specifications mentioned in 'Toolkit on SBM ODF+ and ODF++ protocol' by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, and other sources. It aims to help state and local level planners and decision makers in designing and promoting public and community toilets suited to the requirements of female users.

<sup>2</sup> Available at [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=in.nic.ihhltoiletlocator&hl=en\\_IN](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=in.nic.ihhltoiletlocator&hl=en_IN)

<sup>3</sup> A city / ward / work circle can be notified or declared as SBM ODF+ if, at any point of the day, not a single person is found defecating and/or urinating in the open, and all community and public toilets are functional and well maintained.

## Essential features of a female-friendly toilet



**Figure 2:** An example of the exterior of a female-friendly toilet block

**Credit:** WaterAid/ Verónica Grech

### Be safe, private and spacious

- Separate male and female sections with the entrances facing different directions or at a sufficient distance to maintain privacy.
- Easy and safe to access in a visible location avoiding rundown, dark or remote areas as identified via consultation with women and girls.
- Interiors and surrounding areas well-lit especially when facilities are open at night.
- Robust doors and structure that can be bolted from inside.
- Clear signs and directions in the local language pointing to the different toilet sections (male, female and accessible).
- Spacious cubicle to allow change of clothes.
- Separate gender neutral or third gender toilet, if preferred by transgender or third gender groups in the area.



**Figure 3:** An example of the interior of a female-friendly toilet block

**Credit:** WaterAid/Verónica Grech

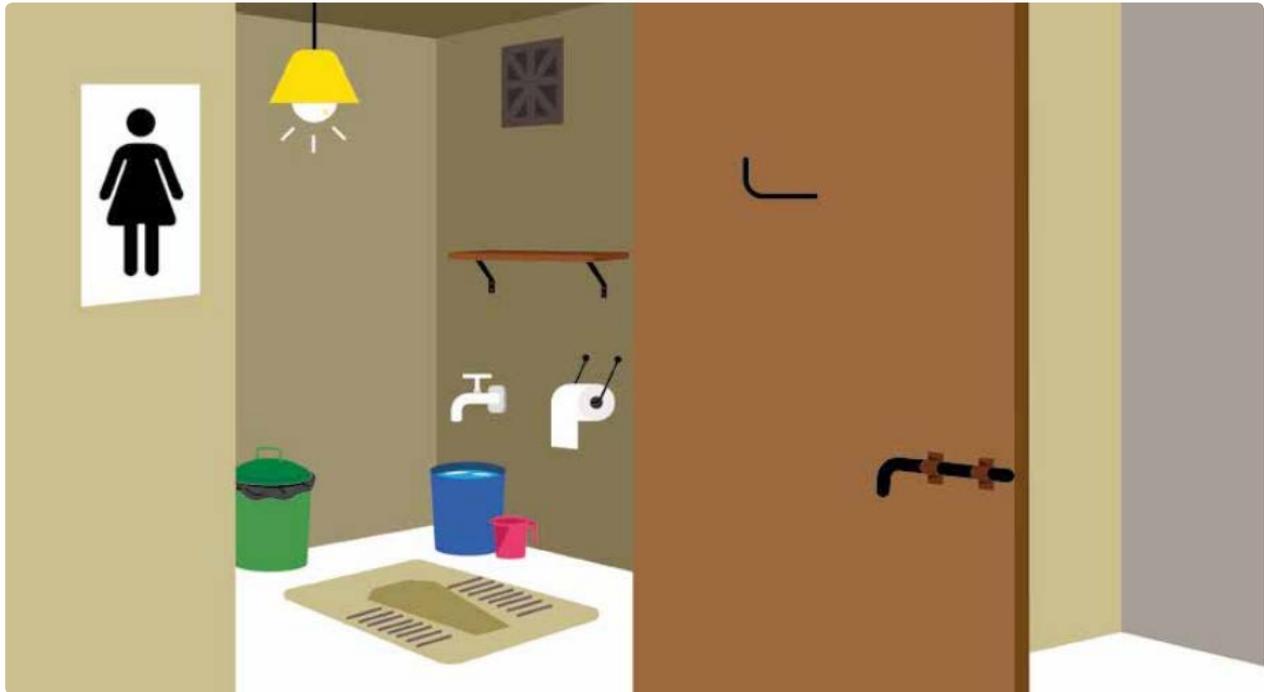
### Cater to menstrual and other hygiene management requirements

- Running water and toilet paper inside each cubicle.
- Basin with water and soap for handwashing, cleaning of reusable menstrual products, etc.
- Access to affordable menstrual absorbents in a visible location.
- Dustbins or incinerators for safe disposal of menstrual products. Closed dustbins along with eco-friendly wrappers could be placed within each cubicle. Incinerators must have an appropriate outlet for fumes, and signages that provide guidance on how to use these, as most of the users may not be aware about it. Preferable to have both options for users with diverse preferences.

- Wash basin in at least one cubicle for washing reusable menstrual absorbents.
- Shelves and hooks for placing menstrual absorbents and hanging bags/clothes.
- A mirror, ideally above handwashing stations, for self-care and to promote handwashing. It must not enable people outside to see inside the toilet.

### Be accessible to all

- Community and public toilets to be located at a reasonable distance from houses and commercial areas.
- Accessible toilet cubicle for persons with disabilities, including aspects such as space in cubicles for wheelchair movement, support frames, width of doors and height of features.
- Accessible path and entrance to the toilet block which is well-lit and wide enough for all users.



**Figure 4:** An example of the interior of a female-friendly toilet cubicle

**Credit:** WaterAid/Verónica Grech

- Children friendly toilet seats and handwashing stations, with appropriate size/height.
- Option of commodes and squat toilets, to cater to users of diverse preferences.
- Well-maintained toilets with a consistent water and electricity supply. Maintenance costs to be factored in during planning.
- Regular and safe removal and disposal of menstrual and other waste.

### **Be well-maintained and managed**

- Attendants to be present during all hours of operation.
- Adequate training of male and female attendants on cleaning, waste disposal, operating napkin vending machines/ incinerator; and being sensitive and responsive to users' requirements, especially women with disabilities.
- A frequent and reliable cleaning schedule should be in place with adequate equipment, cleaning supplies and protective gear, to ensure that the toilet is clean at all times.
- Regular and safe mechanisms for faecal and liquid waste management, by local authorities or licensed operators.
- Clear mechanisms for monitoring, feedback and complaint redressal.



## Female-friendly public and community toilets



**Figure 5:** An example of a female-friendly, accessible toilet cubicle

**Credit:** WaterAid/Verónica Grech

### Be affordable and available whenever needed

- Affordable and appropriate user fee, with free access for the poorest or most excluded.
- Open as per users' requirements (Community toilets to be open 24\*7. Public toilets to be open from 4 am to 10 pm, those with visitors round the clock such as in bus stands, railway stations, hospitals etc to be open 24\*7).
- More female cubicles than in men's toilets. At least one toilet seat in a community toilet, for every six families.
- Can be easily located, through SBM-(U) Toilet Locator, and other android apps.

### Suit the requirements of caregivers and parents

- A clean and safe baby changing station.
- At least one family-friendly cubicle spacious enough for the user and caregiver to be in the cubicle together.

## City-wide planning and local implementation

Provision of female-friendly public and community toilets needs to have a city-wide reach if it is to have a meaningful impact.

A participatory city-wide assessment of the gaps in community and public toilet should be conducted to identify the activity areas and informal settlements in the city which lack public and community toilets, and the extent to which existing toilets meet requirements of female users. This information can be mapped to visualise possible strategies such as providing new female-friendly toilets, upgrading and expanding sub-standard toilets and so on. Building new toilets with female-friendly features, or modifying the existing ones to make them female-friendly might require some additional funds compared to the existing provisions. This may be leveraged from existing municipal budgets, special programs for women and children, corporate donors, or from schemes such as Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT).

For ward and local level implementation, local officials should use participatory processes to understand the experiences and perspectives of existing and potential toilet users. It is critical to take perspectives of women, girls and disadvantaged groups into account and enable their meaningful participation, in order to ensure their inclusion, and build ownership. Community should be consulted to finalise features like the location of community toilets, hours of operations, tariffs, aspects of operation and management, priority female-friendly features, etc. Further, it should be ensured that the processes of construction, operation and maintenance, and monitoring of such facilities are gender sensitive.



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and community toilets

## References

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**Download the detailed guide on Female-friendly  
public and community toilets from:**

<https://washmatters.wateraid.org/female-friendly-toilets>

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