

## Call to Enhanced Action

**Ensure rule of law for  
safe, healthy, equitable  
and dignified rehabilitation of  
women manual scavengers in India**

Despite 27 years of legislative prohibition and strongest possible judicial orders, the age-old inhuman practice of manual scavenging is still prevalent across India. The most undignified form of this is the bare-handed emptying and disposal of human faeces from insanitary dry latrines by women manual scavengers.

Though the Swachh Bharat (Clean India) Mission has led to considerable reduction of insanitary latrines, this led to loss of already meagre livelihoods for many women manual scavengers, in the absence of proper enumeration and rehabilitation. Their woes have further mounted up during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### The lack of robust and consistent data on manual scavengers in public domain highlights their plight:

- In 2002-03, Government of India (GoI) counted 770,338 manual scavengers. Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) 2011 found 182,505 families engaged in manual scavenging. However, as per a response by GoI to the Parliament, only 54,130 manual scavengers were identified till July 2019 in 170 districts across 18 states. Going by civil society studies, **the government enumerations have missed out a large number of these workers.**
- No budget allocated for the Self-employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers (SRMS) from 2014 to 2018 due to substantial unspent balances from previous years. Although INR 2,950 million was allocated during 2018 to 2020, **data on spending and outcomes for this period is not yet publicly available.**
- **Only 8 out of 28 states and 8 union territories in India constitute State Commissions for Safai Karamcharis, a**
- mandatory institution to monitor the implementation of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation (PEMSR) Act, 2013.
- As per publicly available reports, **only 13 states embarked on rehabilitating manual scavengers. So far, only 13,657 manual scavengers rehabilitated** until July 2018 - no details available of the remaining workers and of action post 2018.
- A recent survey, as a part of a project 'Strengthening rule of law and advancing rights and freedom of manual scavengers in India' supported by European Commission - European Instrument of Democracy and Human Rights and implemented by Association for Rural and Urban Needy (ARUN), Centre for Equity Studies (CES) and WaterAid India - revealed a 60% drop in the number of insanitary dry latrines since 2018. However, **most workers who lost their livelihoods, as a result, did not receive**

**India's initiatives for implementation of the PEMSAR Act have not succeeded so far due to poor data, inadequate institutional arrangements to ensure proper implementation, weak monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and the lack of systemic efforts for addressing structural issues around gender, caste and societal discrimination, including sensitisation of administrators and implementers.**



## Call to Action

Reportedly, the Government of India is formulating an inter-ministerial action plan to end all forms of manual scavenging by 2022. Towards achieving SDGs on equality, decent work and justice in their true sense, we appeal the Government of India to ensure the following measures on priority, as part of this action plan:

1. **Ensure revamped systems and mandated institutional** architecture for proper implementation of the PEMSAR Act 2013, SRMS, and other initiatives at national, provincial and local government levels.
2. **Institutionalise state-wise annual/time-bound planning** with committed targets, coupled with regular monitoring and reviews by highest possible authorities.
3. **Create an environment that promotes open acceptance** of the prevalence of this practice, in order to facilitate proper enumeration, data and support to some of the most vulnerable group of workers.
4. **Introduce incentives for proactive implementers** and strong culpability measures for defaulters.
5. **Identify and address current implementation gaps**, including sensitisation of all actors on gender, caste and other aspects of this discriminatory practice.
6. **Introduce best possible technological options** to eradicate all forms of direct human contact with faecal matter.
7. **Actively identify and promote best possible alternative livelihood options** for manual scavengers and ensure advanced education for their children.
8. **Include a national indicator** on issues of manual scavengers under the broad SDG framework.



**SAFAI KARMACHARI ANDOLAN**  
A movement for elimination of manual scavenging

