

# Female-friendly public and community toilets in India: an assessment of a central Indian city

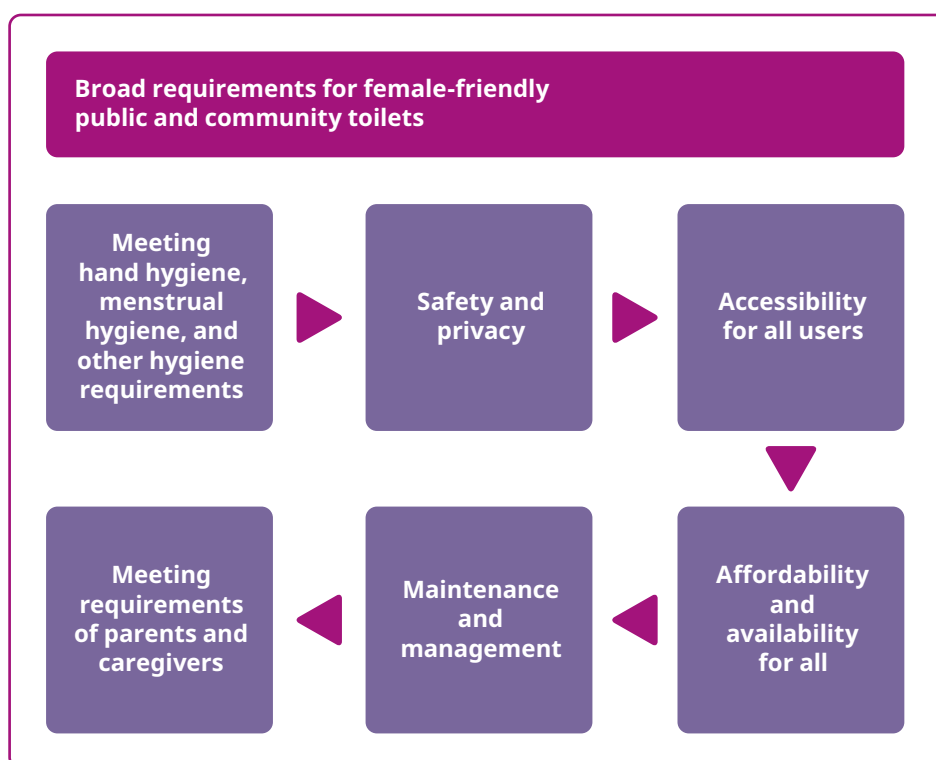


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## Introduction

Sanitation is recognised as a human right and is included in the Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to achieve universal access to sanitation while paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. Public and community toilets must be user-friendly and accessible for all users, including women and girls, with a special focus on the needs of vulnerable groups such as adolescent girls, pregnant women, elderly women and women with disabilities. However, in instances 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 and transgender people face additional disadvantages, as most toilets do not ensure accessibility, safety, privacy and other special needs.

The [Guide for female-friendly public and community toilets](#) by WaterAid, UNICEF and Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP) gives six broad requirements for toilet facilities, taking into account the additional needs and vulnerabilities of female users. These are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Broad requirements for female-friendly public and community toilets

The Indian government's Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has released an [Advisory on public and community toilets](#), and *Guidelines on gender-responsive sanitation* under the Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban, both of which cover some of these aspects. However, media and field reports suggest a greater need for improving the infrastructure and management of public and community toilet facilities.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, WaterAid India conducted an assessment of public and community toilets in a central Indian city,<sup>2</sup> with the objective of understanding the needs of female users in accessing and using these facilities, and the challenges they face.

## Methodology

The assessment was conducted in a central Indian city where WaterAid India operates. Toilet facilities in six public places and four informal settlements were covered. Over these locations, 14 public toilets (in six locations) and four community toilets were included in this assessment. Though the fieldwork also involved visits to other facilities in these locations, the data from only the 18 above locations was significant for this assessment. The identification of locations and facilities was carried out with the input of WaterAid India and a partner organization in the city, in order to ensure diversity in the types of toilet facilities and user groups.

The assessment was conducted by a research consultant engaged by WaterAid India, during February-March 2020. Data collection involved the following processes:

- Observation of public and community toilet facilities using a structured tool on mWater,<sup>3</sup> which was also used to capture photographs.
- Semi-structured interviews with female users.
- Semi-structured interviews with caretakers and cleaners.

The community toilets included in this assessment were all managed by third-party service provider Sulabh International,<sup>4</sup> and varied in the size of their customer base (used by 10-15 women a day in one location and up to 150 women a day in another). Most users of community toilets did not have a toilet at home; in cases where they had toilets at home, they were either blocked or occupied by other family members, so the community toilets were their main toilet. Many however did have a bathing unit at home, so used the community facilities solely for urination and defecation. Public toilets included in this assessment were located in public places

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1 Swachh Bharat for all? Despite community toilets built, access remains an issue for slum dwellers in Delhi / Features (ndtv.com).

Overused, unclean, with lesser number of toilets for women, are just some of Mumbai's sanitation woes / Open Defecation Free Mumbai (ndtv.com)

A narrative exposition on public toilet usage by women: a study from Warangal - Y. Malini Reddy, Srividya Raghavan, Srinivas Chary Vedala, 2019 (sagepub.com)

2 Name of the city, locations of the facilities where the assessment took place, and names of interviewees are not disclosed for safety purposes.

3 mWater is a water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) focused data management system. mWater provides a free, scalable technology platform that enables data-driven management by governments, utilities, water authorities, NGOs, and private sector partners. It is designing to use modern mobile and cloud technologies to help democratize data. Accessed at: <https://www.mwater.co/>.

4 Sulabh International is a third-party service provider which manages the operation and maintenance of public and community toilets on contractual basis.

and used primarily by people in transit and away from home. Of the 14 public toilet facilities included in this assessment, four were located at the intra state bus terminal, five were near some kind of market, two were near the railway station and the other three were near other public locations such as banks, cinemas and cafés. The majority of these public toilets were also managed by Sulabh International with the notable exception of She Lounge, managed by the City's Municipal Corporation. The She Lounge was not included in the assessment scoring tables, but a case study on this toilet has been included at the end of the report.

## Limitations

- Taking photographs in some toilet facilities was difficult when many male and female users were in the complex.
- Interviewing female users of public toilets was difficult as most had prior engagements and did not wish to interact.
- In a few instances, the caretakers and those in charge of a few select public toilet facilities were suspicious of the assessment and restricted the process of study.
- Female users of one community toilet complex thought that the consultant would help them obtain a private toilet for their households.
- Among a couple of the assessed public toilet facilities, few or no female users used the toilet facility. This inhibited the gathering of experiences of female users of those facilities.

## Findings

The findings presented in this report have been structured into six sections, which are in line with the six broad requirements of female-friendly public and community toilets mentioned in Table 1. Each section is made up of tables giving an overview of the parameters, followed by detailed insights.

### 1. Safety and privacy



◀ **Photo 1:** Public toilet at the bus terminal showing signage and separate entrances with no doors. The picture also shows men gathering by the entrance, which can be intimidating for female users.

**Table 1:** Safety and privacy results

Parameter	% Public toilets	% Community toilets
Separate entrance for female toilet section	100	100
Door at the entrance of female toilet section	86	50
Locations easy and safe to access	86	100
Entrance and path to entrance well-lit	100	100
Entrances of male, female and other sections clearly labelled	100	100
Toilet block well-lit from inside <sup>5</sup>	100	100
A separate section for transgender people	0	0
Female caretaker	7	25

### Solid structure in a good location

In general all the toilets scored well in this area – all toilets had a solid structure with a separate well-lit and clearly labelled entrance for women along a well-lit path. However some of the locations were not considered safe by female users. For example, the public toilet in the bus stand was seen as too remote and is very rarely used by females. In other areas women reported feeling intimidated by groups of men sitting at the entrance to the toilet block.

### Security and privacy

In one of the public toilets in a market complex, the sanitary pad vending machine was installed in the common area outside the female toilet block, and many users stated in interviews that they were not comfortable using it. Similarly, in another public toilet complex in a market, the incinerator and sanitary pad vending machine were located inside the female toilet section but very close to the entrance. Since this female block did not have a door, a person using these could be seen from outside.

### Female- and transgender-sensitive management

There was a general sense of dissatisfaction concerning the caretakers at the community toilets, with suspicions of theft of payment and removal of light bulbs. Women also felt embarrassed to ask male caretakers for help with using the vending machines for sanitary products. The caretakers for almost all toilets were male.

No separate sections for transgender people existed. The caretakers of almost all the toilet complexes (public and community) stated that transgender people preferred using the female toilet section.

<sup>5</sup> The toilets were well-lit by natural light during daylight hours.



## Case study

### Sexual harassment in a community toilet

Some interviewees reported an incident of sexual harassment of a young girl at one of the community toilets. One evening, in the dark, some community members spotted an adult male (belonging to the same community) in close proximity to a young girl by the isolated toilets. The community members later realised that the girl would have been molested had they not interfered in time. Fortunately, the girl was not harmed by the time the community members approached the man. Since then, the area around these toilets is deemed unsafe for women and children, especially after dark, because there were no proper light fixtures or a caretaker present in the toilet complex.

### 2. Facilities and provisions for hand hygiene, menstrual hygiene and other hygiene requirements



▲ Photo 2:

A handwashing area at a public toilet at a bus stand with a mirror. The presence of soap was not common in the study. Whilst bins were often present, they did not have lids and were not always well-maintained

► Photo 3:

An incinerator for menstrual waste in a community toilet



**Table 2:** Hand and menstrual hygiene results

Parameter	% Public toilets	% Community toilets
Access to handwashing units	100	100
Running water available in all handwashing units	86	75
Access to soap at the handwashing unit	36	0
Access to sanitary napkin vending machine	93	25
Sanitary napkin vending machine functional	92	100
Access to dustbin(s) inside toilet block	100	50
Access to dustbins inside toilet cubicles	43	50
Access to incinerator	93	25
Incinerator functional	92	25
Access to hooks, ledges, shelves inside all toilet cubicles	0	0
Access to mirror inside female toilet block	100	75
Access to bathing units	71	75
Bathing units open for users (i.e. not locked from outside)	80	100
Bathing units with access to running or stored water	71	75

### Access to water for toilet usage and washing hands

Eighty-six percent of public toilets and 75% of community toilets had access to water in the toilet facility and at the handwashing stations. In one public toilet located in a busy market area, running water was not available, but the caretaker had stored some water aside. In one female toilet block located near the inter-state bus terminal, water was available in only one of the two handwashing units. In one of the informal settlements with a community toilet, interviewees shared that while the toilet has a water tank, water is not available on most days, due to which most of them carry water from their homes. On the day of the field visit users complained that it had been 10 days since the water was refilled.

Access to soap for handwashing was an area of concern in most toilet facilities studied. Only 36% of public toilets had access to soap, and none of the community toilets did. In three of the public toilet facilities the soap was kept with the caretaker, and users were required to ask if they wanted to use soap. This was also the case at one community toilet, but users reported usually washing their hands on their return home. Mirrors were found in most toilets to aid self-care and act as a prompt for handwashing, however some were not always in a discreet location.

Seventy-one percent of public toilets had access to a hand dryer. In all but one of the facilities the hand dryers were placed in the common area. Twenty-five percent of community toilets had a hand dryer.

The [Female-friendly toilet guide](#) suggests that there should be water access in each cubicle, but this was not found in many of the toilets assessed.

### Access to water for bathing

Three quarters of all toilets had bathing units either as a separate unit or as a toilet-cum-bathing area. However in a couple of cases these were found to be locked or used as storage areas. All the bathing units that were open had a tap or shower. Two public toilets did not have access to running water at the time of the field visit, but in both these locations the caretakers had stored water for users.

### Access to hooks/ledges/shelves

None of the toilet facilities had access to ledges or shelves for placing bags, menstrual absorbents, clothing etc. At three sites, a few of the toilet cubicles had hooks.

### Access to menstrual absorbents

Ninety-three percent of public toilets and 25% of community toilets had access to coin-operated sanitary pad vending machines. All of these were functional, except in the case of one public toilet where the caretaker was also selling sanitary pads separately. As mentioned above, the vending machines were not often well located.

### Access to menstrual waste disposal facilities

All public toilets had access to dustbins inside the female toilet blocks, and 43% also had dustbins inside toilet cubicles. In contrast, 50% of community toilets had no dustbin at all. In one of the community toilets, the dustbin in the female toilet block was very small in size and overflowing with waste.

Ninety-three percent of public toilets and 25% of community toilets had an incinerator. Except for one public toilet facility, incinerators in all other locations were functional – though the positioning was often not very private. It was observed that some users were not aware of how to use the incinerator. In two facilities, the menstrual waste was being put in the ashtray of the incinerator, instead of the collection box.

► **Photo 4:**  
One of the  
assessed  
community  
toilet facilities





### 3. Accessibility for all users

► **Photos 5-6:**

A ramp to the entrance of a community toilet and the accessible toilet in the female section of a public toilet with handrails, a seated toilet and an outward opening door



**Table 3:** Accessibility results

Parameter	% Public toilets	% Community toilets
Accessible toilet for women and girls with disabilities	64	75
Separate toilet for female users with disabilities in the female toilet block	21	50
Accessible toilet for people with disabilities as a separate gender-neutral accessible section	50	25
Wide outward opening door in accessible toilet cubicle	11	33
Wide inward opening door in accessible toilet cubicle	89	67
Adequate space to accommodate wheelchair and/or caregiver inside the accessible toilet cubicle	67	67
Access to raised toilet seat/Western commode inside the accessible toilet cubicle	100	100
Access to handrails/grab bars inside the accessible toilet cubicle	100	67
All features and fixtures positioned at a lower height inside the accessible toilet cubicle	67	67
Dustbin in the accessible toilet cubicle	56	33
Ramp for access to the toilet facilities	100	100
Rail to support users of the ramp	44	25
Tactile signs for visually impaired users	0	0



### Separate accessible cubicle

The [Female-friendly toilet guide](#) indicates that, at a minimum, a toilet block should have at least one toilet cubicle in each of the male and female sections that is accessible for people with disabilities. This assessment showed that 21% of public toilets and half (two) of the community toilets met this criteria. In one toilet complex located near a market place, there were two accessible toilets for people with disabilities. One was in the female section, and the other was in the common area as a separate gender-neutral accessible section. This separate gender-neutral accessible section was constructed recently. In other public toilets the only accessible toilet for people living with disabilities was located in the male block.

Two-thirds of the accessible toilet cubicles had enough space for a wheelchair or caregiver in the cubicle, and the same proportion had features and fixtures at a lower height. All cubicles in public toilets and most of the community toilets had handrails and a raised toilet seat. Features that had not been well considered were having an outward opening door and a dustbin within the cubicle. The toilets for people living with disabilities were often reported to be dirty and poorly maintained. At one facility it was reported that very few females with disabilities use the accessible toilet.

### Accessible path

All of the community toilets had an accessibility ramp, though only one had handrails to assist users. All public toilets that had accessible toilets had ramps leading up to them, but less than half of those with ramps had rails. These ramps were all well-lit. None of the toilet blocks had considered tactile signage for visually impaired users but some did have tactile pavements.

## Case study

### Experiences of elderly women using community toilets

Two of the elderly women interviewed at two different community toilets had severe knee pain, meaning that using a traditional toilet is extremely difficult for them.

In one community, the elderly woman uses the cubicle provided for people with disabilities in the female toilet block. She has been extremely happy with this new facility and the raised toilet seat provides a lot of relief for her.

In another community the cubicle for people living with disabilities is gender neutral, but is often closed or the elderly woman is told she cannot use it. The woman then has to use the squatting toilets in the female block which causes her discomfort. Therefore, despite the physical presence of accessible toilets there is work yet to be done to make the community toilets truly accessible for all.

## 4. Affordability and availability for all

**Table 4:** Affordability and availability results

Parameter	% Public toilets	% Community toilets
User charges applicable	86	50
User charges clearly displayed at or around entrance in local/English language	71	50
Timings clearly displayed at or around the entrance, in English	78	75
Timings clearly displayed at or around the entrance, in local language	0	25

### Affordability

Two of the community toilets had user charges, though these were reported differently by different respondents and only one toilet displayed the charges on a poster (though they were different again from the reported cost). In one, the information stated that use was free but users reported being charged by the caretaker. Some regular users paid daily, and some monthly. One user said that the fee sometimes becomes a financial burden, as each member of the family has to pay separately. The uncertainty of tariffs also came up in interviews as a problem for users.

Almost all the public toilets have user charges that were fairly standardised across all locations (5 rupees for defecation, 5/10 rupees for bathing and nothing for urination). This system of payment can sometimes be seen as discriminatory against women, who have to pay defecation prices to manage menstrual needs for example. It was not known if this was the case in this city.

► **Photo 7:**  
Female cubicles including a squatting cubicle without a door



## Open when needed

Three of the four community toilet complexes presented some confusion over opening times, with different responses from caretakers, users and the information board. One of the locations had different timings displayed in English and the local language. For users for whom these toilets are their only option, 24-hour access is important. All the public toilets opened from 6am to 10pm except one which was open 24 hours at the bus stand.

## Enough cubicles

In most of the public facilities there was only one female cubicle. Many women reported using the child-friendly cubicles (with curtains) when other cubicles or urinals were engaged, since there are not enough cubicles for women in the blocks. The women's urinals were often very poorly maintained.

## 5. Maintenance and management

► **Photo 8:**  
A digital feedback device in a community toilet



**Table 5:** Maintenance and management results

Parameter	% Public toilets	% Community toilets
Caretaker present	93	100
Female cleaner	21	0
Toilet cleaning schedule present	29	25
Toilet cleaning schedule being used	21	25
Electricity supply at the time of visit	100	100
Water supply at the time of visit	93	100
User-feedback mechanism in place	71	75

## Cleanliness

Many of the public toilet facilities were not in a clean condition during the visit, and the researcher found there to be a foul smell at two of them. Two of the female public toilet blocks were found to be 'extremely dirty', and in every public toilet the interviewees complained about the lack of cleanliness. In most of the public toilet facilities the cleaner was either absent or on leave at the time of observation. Very few had a toilet cleaning schedule present, and even fewer were using it. Caretakers reported that the provided cleaning materials are not adequate, and one said that he sometimes has to buy soap for cleaning out of his own money.

By contrast, three of the four community toilet blocks were found to be comparatively clean, though again no cleaners were present during observations so their opinions have not been captured. In some, the caretaker also takes on the cleaning role. Only one of the four community toilets was found to have issues with the supply of cleaning materials.

## Well-maintained

The water and electricity supply to the toilets seemed to be good and fairly consistent, though quite a few of the facilities had broken taps, cubicle doors or latches. The presence of a caretaker at most facilities was encouraging, though many reported issues with payment and misuse of the toilets (women and children throwing rubbish outside instead of in provided bins for example). They also complained about long work hours (18-20 hours a day). Most caretakers are given accommodation within the toilet complex. In one location in an informal settlement, the caretaker was absent during the time of the observations, it was the children of the settlement who were taking care of the toilet complex on behalf of the caretaker, and also collecting user charges.

## Solid waste management

All the caretakers stated that the solid waste of the public toilet facility is dumped in the main dustbin at the entrance/in the toilet block, and later this waste is dumped in municipal bodies' waste collection van. One caretaker stated that sometimes the solid waste is also burned outside the toilet complex.

## Feedback

The majority of community and public toilets had the opportunity for user feedback. In a few locations, even though the feedback machine was installed, it was not functional at the time of the observations. Many of the machines were located near the male toilet block and was therefore difficult for females to use.



## 6. Meeting requirements of parents and caregivers

**Table 6:** Affordability and availability results

Parameter	% Public toilets	% Community toilets
Access to baby-changing station	0	0
Access to breast-feeding station	0	0
Access to a child-friendly cubicle	79	100
Access to a child-friendly handwashing station	64	25

All the community toilet facilities and most public toilet facilities had a cubicle for children. In all the sites visited, the toilets labelled as ‘child-friendly’ were exactly the same as other toilet cubicles in terms of design, accessibility and features, with the only difference being that these had a curtain instead of a door (the rationale was that children find it difficult to lock and unlock the door from inside, hence a curtain makes it ‘child-friendly’). Much fewer toilets had a child-friendly handwashing station, and where they did exist they were usually in the common area. The handrail in the children’s toilets were often not in a useful position for squatting over the toilet (see Figure 7).

The [Female-friendly toilet guide](#) states that women are much more likely to be caregivers and travelling with either a child or an adult who needs support. Larger cubicles are therefore required to fit more than one person. These were sometimes present in the form of cubicles for people living with disabilities, but there were no specific family or caregiver cubicles. There were also no baby-changing facilities or breast-feeding areas in any of the assessed facilities.

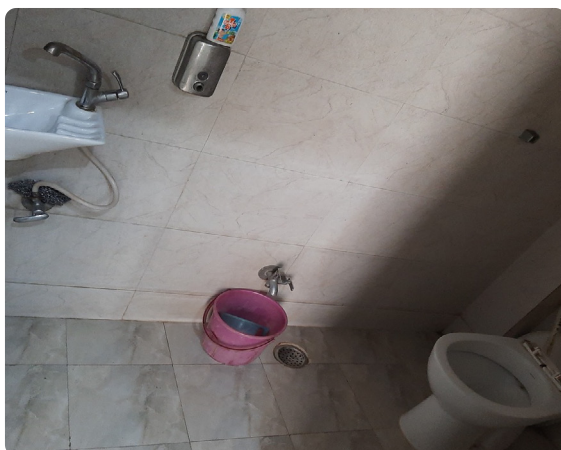
► **Photo 9:**  
A cubicle designated for children in a community toilet block



## Case study

### She Lounge

The 'She Lounge', managed by the City's Municipal Corporation, was not included in the assessment alongside the other facilities, which were all managed by a third-party service providers. The She Lounge serves as a model not only for a female-friendly space with proper and feasible access to restrooms, but also as a secure space for women's comfort and preference. There are currently three She Lounge facilities in the city out of a planned 14. They were constructed to cater to the needs of women who work in the market and those come to shop.



### Safety and privacy

Importantly, whilst the manager of the facility was male, the lounge was run on a day-to-day basis by women with the caretaker and cleaner also being female, making it feel like a safe space for female users. Many users use the space three to four times a day, even just to have some relaxation time. The lighting was good inside and outside the lounge at the time of observation. The lounge had exhaust fans for ventilation.

### Facilities and provisions for hand and menstrual hygiene

Both toilet cubicles had a hand washing station within the cubicle with a mirror above the sink and soap available. A number of beauty and hygiene products were sold from inside the Lounge and were on display. There was also a sanitary pad vending machine, though at the time of observation this was not functional; users

continued ►

## Case study

continued

could buy products from the caretaker instead. There was a dustbin with a lid in the lounge but not in each cubicle. There is an incinerator in one of the cubicles that was not working during the visit. Users stated that they feel very comfortable using the facility during menstruation as it is very private and there are no men around.

### Accessibility for all users

The assessed lounge was located near the market, making it easy for female users to locate and reach. There is good signage for the facility. There are two toilet cubicles which are both large and one has a raised toilet seat. However there are no hand rails and the toilets are not specifically designed for people living with disabilities. The entrance also doesn't have a ramp – the caretaker often helps elderly women to enter.

### Affordability and availability for all

There is no charge to use the facilities, users were charged only for any products bought from the lounge or sanitary napkins. The lounge is open between 10.30am and 8.30pm.

### Maintenance and management

The facilities were extremely clean even before the morning cleaning began and was witnessed. Users have to use the slippers provided at the entrance to help with maintaining levels of cleanliness. However, the caretaker and cleaner complained that users are not always respectful and do not use the bins provided for used sanitary napkins or do not flush the toilet. There is a regular supply of water and electricity, though there are sometimes issues with water supply and during that time the lounge remains open but the toilet cubicles are locked. There is a user feedback machine.

### Meeting requirements of parents and caregivers

The lounge has comfortable seating for users to rest and there are places for women to breastfeed. However there is no child-friendly toilet cubicle or hand washing station due to space constraints.

## Conclusion

The assessment of four community toilet facilities in four different locations and 14 public toilet facilities in seven different locations across the city, over a span of 10 days, aided in gathering pertinent understanding and identification of the gaps and challenges that exist in the selected facilities in the assessed city. The assessment helped explore factors that make a toilet facility more or less female-friendly, and that are needed to create a safe environment for women using community and public toilets. The assessment of these community and public facilities was carried out by gathering data and crucial insights through semi-structured interviews of the participants (including women, caretakers, cleaners, children and other locals), and by employing assessment tools for recording quantitative and qualitative observations of these facilities.

The user experiences of women in community and public toilets shed light on the diverse experiences of women from different social locations and standpoints. User experiences of certain sections of women, especially in community toilets, spoke volumes about their plight and impediments in using proper facilities for reasons linked to their vulnerable social location, and the nexus of deeply-rooted class differences in access to basic sanitation. Additionally, the narratives of the caretakers of these facilities, and children, gave insightful accounts and were pertinent in analysis.

Amongst the toilet facilities covered in this city, very few could be considered ‘female-friendly’, and a few were lacking even the basic amenities. At one set of community toilets, women explained that even though the facilities had been constructed for the welfare of all community members, it actually marginalised the women who have no choice but to use this facility. Their predicament in using the facilities not only sheds light on the challenges they face, but also a desire to have private toilets at home that would help them escape the challenges of using community facilities. Among the public toilets the researcher visited, the She Lounge (specifically catering to women) stood out as the most female-friendly facility. It was the most preferred restroom facility, too. On the contrary, another toilet facility at ISBT bus stand was not well-maintained by the ISBT sanitation department, and lacked a number of the desirable features of a female-friendly toilet.

A crude analysis was done by averaging the percentages for each section, and the results are shown in Table 7. These percentages can be seen to show the average percentage of criteria met by all combined facilities.

**Table 7:** Overall results

Parameter	% Public toilets	% Community toilets
Safety and privacy	72	72
Facilities and provisions for hand and menstrual hygiene	76	55
Accessibility for all users	59	53
Affordability and availability for all	59	50
Maintenance and management	61	61
Meeting requirements of parents and caregivers	36	31

The weakest area overall was the ability of toilet facilities to meet the requirements of women as parents and caregivers, with very few facilities providing anything other than a cubicle with a curtain for children. Women and girls still hold most caregiving responsibilities for children, and for older and sick family and community members and those with disabilities. Public and community toilets should support them to do so, while not preventing men from taking these roles.

The scores are low for affordability and availability and lack of opening hours shown in the local language, though the score is also indicative of a lack of information and transparency regarding user fees and opening hours.



The final area that came up repeatedly in the study was maintenance of the facilities, with almost all toilets visited found to be extremely unclean and unhygienic. This seemed to be due to several factors including lack of bins, lack of municipal services for onward waste management, poor user behaviour (perhaps in turn due to a lack of information or pride), and lack of decent working conditions for cleaners and caretakers. This reflects across all categories of the study.

More positively, almost all the toilets were housed in solid structures with doors and a decent amount of privacy for females. They were well-lit and well-signposted and were considered as safe as any of the surrounding area.

Proper sanitation and access to user-friendly female toilets are desirable by all female users, irrespective of age and social location. A female-friendly toilet not only eases the experience of using the toilet facility, but also empowers women and girls, creates spaces of inclusivity, and boosts their confidence and self-respect in using toilets. Creating safer spaces and constructing convenient toilets from the perspective of women, and identifying the diverse needs of female users in using community and public toilets, helps in holistically constructing toilets that take into account all women and their needs. This study thus aimed to identify those needs, experiences, and the gaps that impede the female-friendly experience of using public and community toilets in a representative city in central India. There were a number of gaps found in the assessment of the public and community facilities, but the She Lounge served as a model for one of the best and most enriching ways of creating safe, secure and female-friendly restroom spaces for women.

## Recommendations

Most of the following recommendations come from users of the facilities, or caretakers who work there. They are arranged using the same categories as the findings, following the [Female-friendly toilet guide](#).

### 1. Safety and privacy

- All toilets should be easy to locate with **clear signage**.
- Add public toilet facilities to **online map** services to make them easy to search for and find.
- Assign a **female caretaker** and cleaner in female sections.
- Caretakers should make sure that the doors of male toilet blocks are closed to **maintain privacy** for female users. Future designs should consider privacy in the location of the different sections of the toilets.
- Fixtures such as dustbins and sanitary pad vending machines should be located such that they can be used without compromising privacy.
- The **She Lounge** creates a safe space for women who do not have access to a toilet in their workplace. This initiative should be replicated at other locations in the town.
- Ensure that entrance doors have **door handles on both sides** for security and ease of use.

## 2. Facilities and provisions for hand and menstrual hygiene

- Install **soap dispensers** in all toilet blocks and maintain regular checks to keep them filled. Alternatively, soap strips could be used as an affordable alternative for users who do not wish to use the dispensers.
- **Hooks and shelves** should be installed in the toilet cubicles, urinal and bathing units.
- **Information posters** could be used to give guidance on using the sanitary napkin vending machine, disposal options (including incinerator where available), and other more general information on hygiene. These should be picture-based and simple so that women can understand the information without having to seek clarity from male attendants.
- Hand dryers and user feedback machines should be situated in the female block in locations that afford the user some privacy.

## 3. Accessibility for all users

- Ensure that all toilet facilities have **accessible toilet cubicles** in the female blocks or in common areas.
- Make sure that the cubicles for people living with disabilities can be used by **wheelchair users** and also take into account a range of other disabilities and difficulties.
- Consider **tactile signage** throughout facilities.

## 4. Affordability and availability for all

- Make user **fees fair, affordable for all, and transparent** and communicate the same to the entire community.
- Put in place mechanisms to ensure that **collection of fees** is equitable

## 5. Maintenance and management

- Consider town-wide **workshops or training** for cleaners and caretakers of public and community toilets.
- Provide **guidelines to caretakers** for keeping and maintaining female and accessible toilet cubicles, including the positioning of dustbins and water supply.
- Improve accountability of caretakers, in particular to ensure **access to all toilet cubicles**, to avoid issues with operators locking some cubicles for their own use.
- Proper information and knowledge should be given to cleaners and caretakers regarding the importance of the **use of the masks and gloves while cleaning**.
- **Improve user feedback mechanisms** to make sure action is taken based on the results of user experience.

## 6. Meeting requirements of parents and caregivers

- **Child-friendly doors** for child-friendly toilet cubicles should be installed instead of curtains, which were found to compromise privacy and make children feel embarrassed. Also, these cubicles should have child-friendly toilet seats suitable for children.

Additionally, the following are some recommendations for further work at a higher level to ensure continued monitoring of toilet provision in the assessed city and others:

- Studies should be conducted on the user experience of the **transgender community** and the issues and challenges they face while using the facilities.
- A study of **women on duty** (i.e. police; sanitation workers) should be initiated to understand the issues they face while using public toilets on duty.
- Engage **local women and young girls** from communities, schools and colleges in assessments of toilet facilities to gain first-hand perspectives on useability and female-friendliness.
- Carry out **periodic audits** of the female-friendliness of public and community toilets.
- **Advocate** for increased female-friendly toilets, especially targeting male decision makers, using tools that help understand the practical difficulties faced by female users of public and community toilets – for instance the video ‘Ki and Ka in search of a toilet’<sup>6</sup> developed by Anveshi Research Centre for Women’s Studies, Hyderabad.
- Look into initiating a **women’s commission** at city level to represent the needs of females, with the power to give instructions to specific departments and officials.
- Ensure that **institutional heads** and authorities are accountable for ensuring that the toilets in their buildings are female friendly.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vR44DU75\\_NM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vR44DU75_NM)

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### Additional information:

- The *Female-friendly public and community toilets: a guide for planners and decision makers* can be accessed at: <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/female-friendly-public-and-community-toilets-a-guide-for-planners-and-decision-makers>
- This assessment was part of a series of assessments done across four countries – Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Tanzania. The summary of each country assessment as well as a four country overview report can be accessed at: <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/female-friendly-public-and-community-toilets-a-guide-for-planners-and-decision-makers>
- An assessment tool to help assess the female-friendliness of public and community toilets can be accessed on the mWater WASH data management platform (free and open access) at: <https://formlink.mwater.co/#/90ec9f061ae041c583643de0fea05095/409d75577b6f460ea13a167facec5678?branding=mwater>



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