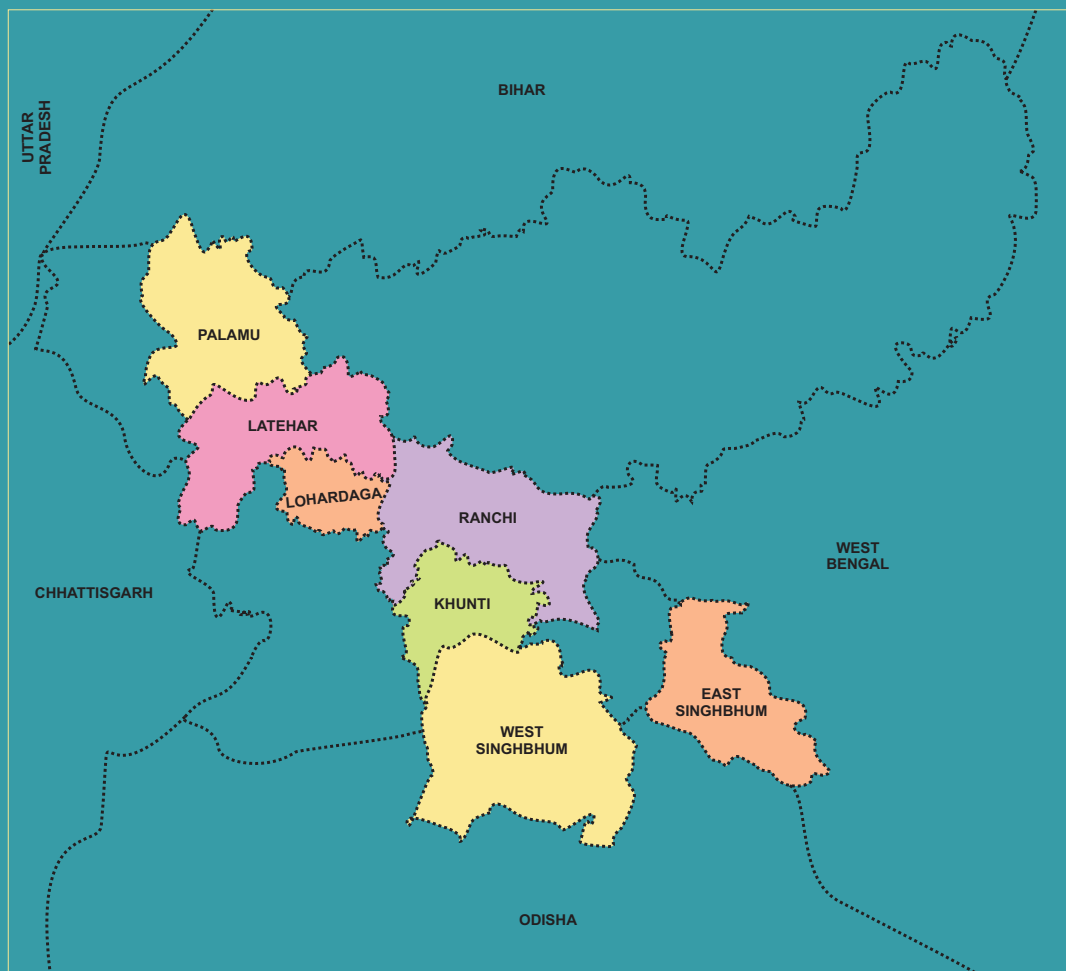


# Beyond Restrooms: Understanding the Educational and Social Ramifications of Inadequate Toilet Access for Girls in Jharkhand



Jagori  
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## Foreword

In a pre-budget consultation organised by the Jharkhand Ministry of Finance in January 2023, seeking ‘actionable points’ from civil society organisations, Jagori passionately raised concerns about the critical issue of girls’ education and early marriages. They highlighted that while Jharkhand has witnessed progress, alarming statistics such as the low percentage of women in rural areas with 10 or more years of education (merely 26.3% according to NFHS 5) and the high rate of girls married before 18 years of age (36%) underscored the urgent need for action.

Jagori emphasised the critical correlation between these statistics, identifying the lack of toilets with water in schools, especially post-puberty, as a significant factor contributing to girls’ dropout rates. The government needs to prioritise allocating funds for girls’ toilets in schools. This measure would achieve a three-fold outcome, not only mitigate dropout rates but also contribute to achieving SDG 4 and preventing early marriages. Moreover, access to toilets for women should be among the government’s topmost priorities, addressing fundamental safety concerns faced by women due to the lack of public toilets and streetlights.

The Finance Minister, acknowledging Jagori’s input during his speech, affirmed his commitment to addressing the issue, urging all departments to take necessary steps. This recognition highlights the significance of Jagori’s insights and the government’s responsiveness to critical societal concerns.

Jagori’s dedication to women’s safety issues is further evidenced by work on integrating these concerns into Panchayats since September 2022 through the Mahila Suraksha in Panchayats (MSP) Core Group. Despite budget constraints, Jagori mobilised resources to conduct a rapid assessment of girls’ toilets in collaboration with fellow organisations, reflecting a collective commitment to gender justice. This initiative aligns with Jagori’s broader efforts to create safe spaces, highlighting how the lack of safe and accessible toilets further compounds the challenges faced by women and girls. While acknowledging the limitations of the sample size, Jagori’s research report sheds light on the challenges surrounding girls’ toilets in the seven districts, serving as a compelling call to action and prompting further reflection on the broader implications for girls’ education and safety across Jharkhand.

## **Introduction, background and rationale**

Access to quality education is a fundamental human right, essential for personal development, economic empowerment, and social progress. However, achieving universal education, particularly for girls, remains a formidable challenge in many parts of the world. In India, despite significant strides in expanding educational opportunities, gender disparities persist, with girls facing unique barriers to accessing and staying in school. From a feminist standpoint, this is a structural barrier that can ultimately result in not only lower rates of education among girls, but also early marriage and pregnancy, low workforce participation and poverty.

One critical barrier that impedes girls' education is the lack of adequate sanitation facilities in schools. Proper sanitation infrastructure, including clean and functional toilets, is essential for maintaining hygiene, ensuring privacy and safety, and promoting a conducive learning environment. Yet, across many regions in India, schools struggle to provide basic sanitation facilities, specially tailored to meet the needs of girl students.

Access to proper sanitation facilities in schools, especially for girls, has been a persistent challenge in many parts of India. Despite various initiatives and policies like the Sarv Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) and, the Swachh Bharat Swachh Vidyalaya Campaign, aimed at improving school infrastructure, the availability and functionality of toilets, particularly for girls, remain inadequate.

According to the Census Report of India (2011) and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS, 2021-2022), inadequate sanitation facilities in schools contribute to higher dropout rates among girls, exacerbating the already existing gender disparities in education. According to the Project Approval Board (PAB), the dropout rate in 2020-21 at the secondary level in Bihar was 21.4 percent, Gujarat 23.3%, Madhya Pradesh 23.8% Odissa 16.04%, Jharkhand 16.6%, higher than the national dropout rate of 14.6% (Ministry of Education, 2022).

In 2020, the Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report, a survey conducted by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, highlighted that the percentage of girls getting married before attaining the age of majority is alarmingly high. This issue reflects the urgent need for interventions to protect the rights and well-being of women and girls in

Jharkhand. The survey disclosed that 5.8 % of girls **in Jharkhand are married before they reach the age of majority**, a percentage significantly higher than the national average of 1.9 % (The Sample Registration System(SRS) Statistical Report, 2020)

Furthermore, studies conducted by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reveal that in India a substantial number of 23 million girls drop out of school due to factors directly related to inadequate sanitation facilities. For instance, the lack of access to clean and separate toilets for girls, coupled with issues such as broken doors, absence of running water, and unavailability of sanitary pads, significantly impact girls’ attendance and participation in schools. Girls often miss school during menstruation due to the unhygienic and uncomfortable conditions of school toilets, leading to academic disengagement and, ultimately, dropouts (UNICEF, 2018).

Moreover, disparities in literacy rates between males and females in states like Jharkhand further underscore the importance of addressing infrastructural gaps in schools. Despite efforts to improve primary education under initiatives like the Operation Blackboard scheme, the availability of girls’ toilets remains inadequate, particularly in states like Chhattisgarh, Bihar, and Jharkhand.

Recent initiatives in some regions, such as the construction of additional toilets in schools, have shown promising results in improving attendance among girls. For instance, middle schools in Ranchi neighbourhoods (Hindpiri, Karamtoli and Nagri) - have witnessed increased attendance among girl students following the construction of new toilets. However, challenges remain, including the need for separate toilets that are safe, functional, sanitary, and have menstrual hygiene management facilities.

Additionally, studies highlight the multifaceted impact of inadequate sanitation facilities on girls’ education. Beyond physical discomfort, lack of privacy, and hygiene-related issues, social and cultural factors contribute to girls’ reluctance to attend school, particularly during menstruation. Norms surrounding early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and societal expectations further limit girls’ access to education.

In conclusion, addressing the sanitation infrastructure gap in schools, especially with regard to fulfilling girls' needs, is crucial for promoting gender equity in education and reducing dropout rates. A glance at the budget allocations/provisions (See Box on Page 16) doesn't seem to indicate paucity or non-availability of funds required either for building and maintaining safe and functional toilets for girls in schools or providing sanitary napkins. What is lacking probably, is information and awareness about them as far as stakeholders and the general public are concerned. There is an urgent need to disseminate information on budgets in an easy-to-understand manner and to regularly monitor budget utilisation. While progress has been made in some areas, sustained efforts, backed by policy interventions and community engagement, are necessary to ensure that all schools provide safe, hygienic, and inclusive environments conducive to girls' education and well-being.

Our research report aims to delve into the intricate relationship between sanitation facilities in schools and girls' education outcomes, particularly focusing on dropout rates. Drawing upon a comprehensive literature review and empirical evidence, the report seeks to highlight the significance of addressing infrastructural gaps in schools to promote gender equity in education.

## **Methodology:**

### **Research Objectives:**

- To assess the status of sanitation infrastructure in schools in select districts of Jharkhand, including the availability, functionality, and accessibility of toilets for girls.
- To identify the specific challenges faced by girls in accessing adequate sanitation facilities, considering factors such as hygiene, privacy, safety, and menstrual hygiene management.
- To analyse the impact of inadequate sanitation facilities on girls' attendance, participation in school activities, and dropout rates.

### **Research Questions:**

- What is the status of sanitation facilities in schools in rural Jharkhand, particularly the availability and functionality of toilets for girls?

- What are the specific challenges and barriers faced by girls in accessing adequate sanitation facilities in schools?
- How do inadequate sanitation facilities impact girls' attendance, participation, and dropout rates in schools?

### Sample Size, tools, and methods

The rapid assessment was conducted across 154 schools in seven districts of Jharkhand: East Singhbhum, Gumla, Khunti, Lohardaga, Palamu, Ranchi, and West Singhbhum

### JHARKHAND MAP

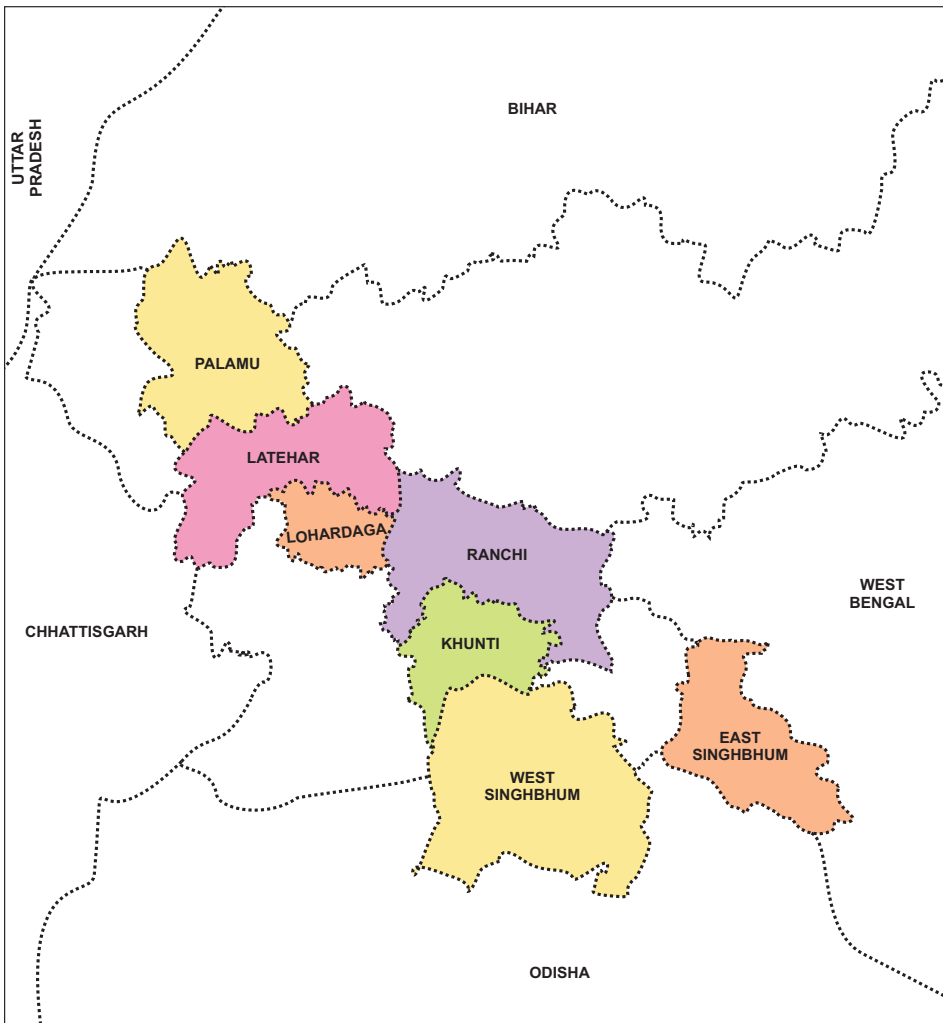


Figure 1: Map of surveyed districts in Jharkhand.



Our approach involved the administration of a detailed questionnaire divided into three distinct sections. The first section comprised a checklist to be observed and filled out by our data collectors. The second section was directed towards school authorities, including School Management Committee (SMC) members and teachers, while the third section was designed to gather responses from the adolescent girls attending these schools.

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of our data, we undertook multiple rounds of orientation for our data collectors before and during the data collection process. This helped maintain consistency and quality in data collection. Additionally, the survey was piloted wherein data was collected from six students from different schools. Feedback from this led to necessary adjustments and refinements in the questionnaire, ensuring it was well-tailored to our research needs. The data was collected by dedicated volunteers from the Mahila Suraksha in Panchayat (MSP) Core Group organisations.

Given the sensitive nature of the study, which involved adolescent girls, obtaining informed consent was paramount. We emphasised the importance of ethical considerations and ensured that all participants were fully aware of the study's purpose and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time.

**Limitations:**

- One of the notable limitations of this study pertains to the data collection process. While the data collectors were volunteers from fellow organisations in Jharkhand, they were not researchers themselves. Consequently, the data collection lacked the rigour and incentive typically associated with formal research endeavors. Moreover, the use of closed-ended questions, such as yes-no or multiple-choice formats, proved limiting factors impacting the depth of responses and nuanced understanding of the subject matter.
- Furthermore, since the study adopted a rapid assessment approach, there may be limitations in the breadth and depth of data collected, particularly in capturing qualitative insights.

## Research findings:

### Facilities and maintenance:

A majority of the schools surveyed through rapid assessment were public co-educational institutions, comprising 94.1% of the sample. Regarding toilet infrastructure, it was observed that 80.5% of the toilets were situated within the school premises, while 19.4% were located outside, either in front of or behind the school.

Government mandates stipulate the construction of one toilet each for boys and girls for schools with fewer than 20 students, two toilets each for 20-35 students, three toilets each for 35-60 students, and four toilets each for more than 60 students. **However, the rapid assessment reveals a significant discrepancy, with one toilet for anywhere between 17 and 410 girls.**

In terms of cleanliness, girls reported that only 68.2% of the toilets were cleaned regularly, leaving 31.8% neglected in terms of regular maintenance. Shockingly, a significant portion (**57.1%**) of the toilets were cleaned by students themselves, indicating the use of child labour and a lack of appointed cleaning staff in the schools due to lack of knowledge or information about designated funds. Conversely, in only 24.6% of the schools was a dedicated cleaner appointed for toilet maintenance. Additionally, in 11.6% of the schools, students undertook regular cleaning duties while a cleaner visited once a week.

### Who cleans the toilets

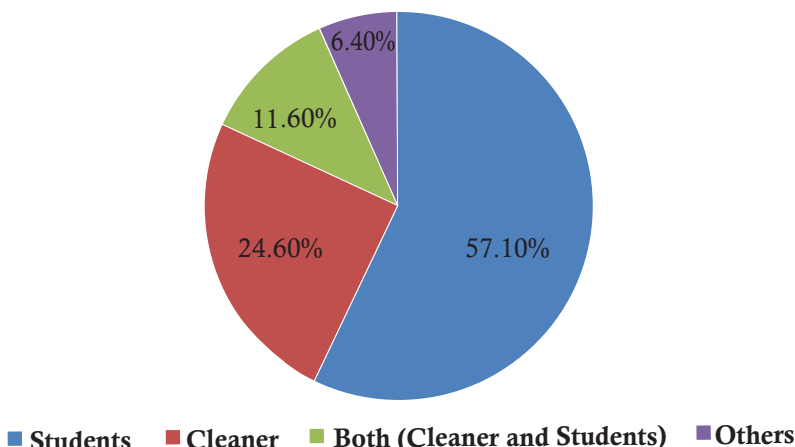


Figure 2: Who cleans the toilets?

Regarding safety and privacy, the presence of doors on toilet facilities was prevalent in majority of the schools, accounting for 90.9% of the surveyed schools. However, a **concerning 3.8% of the doors were either broken or rendered unusable**. Alarming, **5.1% of schools lacked doors entirely**, exacerbating concerns regarding safety and privacy for girl students.

The survey revealed significant deficiencies in the toilet facilities of the surveyed schools. Approximately 40% of the schools had lighting installed in their toilets, whereas a majority, about **60%, lacked any lighting** in these essential facilities.

Additionally, **56.4% of the surveyed schools did not have water facilities within their toilets**. As a result, girls are compelled to carry water from outside to clean themselves after using the toilet. This practice often leads to water spillage, wetting their clothes and potentially increasing the risk of infections such as urinary tract infections (UTIs).

The survey findings revealed that only 33.7% of the schools had facilities for hand washing, including the availability of soap with **over 65% of the schools lacked these essential hygiene provisions** within their toilets. This significant shortfall underscores a major gap in the sanitary infrastructure of the surveyed schools.

### Facilities in the toilets

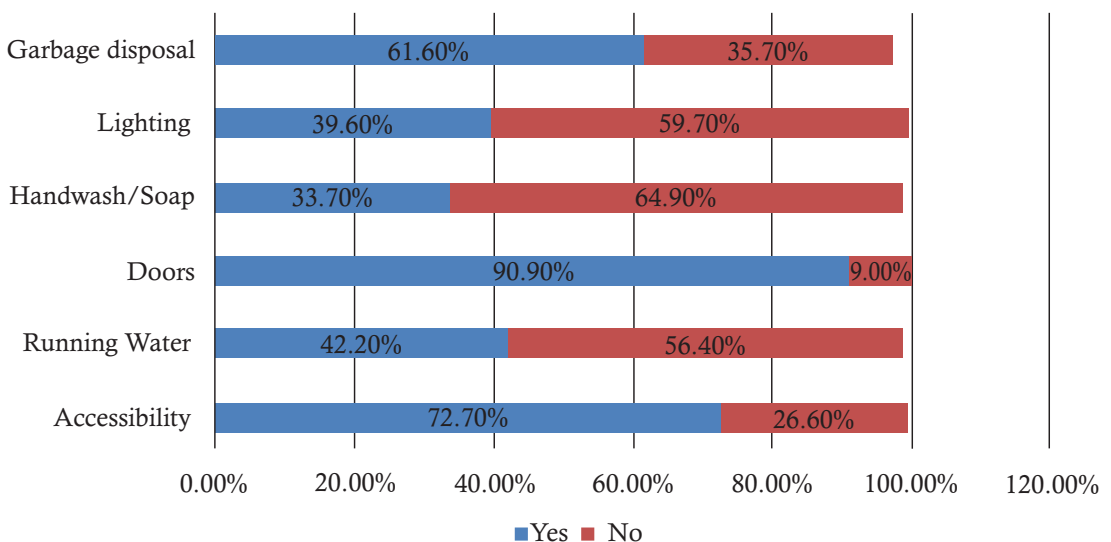


Figure 3: Available facilities inside the toilets

The survey results indicate that 61.6% of the schools had provisions for garbage disposal, while **35.7% lacked proper mechanisms for managing waste**. Additionally, the survey revealed that in 50% of the schools, toilet drains were cleaned regularly. However, the other 50% reported that drains were not maintained consistently, leading to foul smell and frequent blockages. These issues not only affect the overall sanitation of the school but also pose health risks to the students and staff.

**The provisions for students with disabilities were found to be severely lacking. Only 1.9% of the schools had separate toilets for students with disabilities, while a staggering 95.4% had no such specific arrangements.** Furthermore, 71.4% of the schools lacked ramp facilities, impeding accessibility for students with mobility challenges. Of the schools surveyed, 18.1% provided Indian-style toilets for students with disabilities, and only 1.2% had Western-style toilets, which are generally more accessible for individuals with physical disabilities.

### **Menstrual Health:**

Maintaining menstrual hygiene is crucial for the health and well-being of adolescent girls. According to NFHS-5 (2019–2021) data, 70.8% of women aged 15–24 years now use hygienic methods of protection during their menstrual periods. However, the rapid assessment with girls revealed that **83.1% of the surveyed schools do not provide sanitary napkins**. Only 16.8% of the schools make sanitary pads available through vending machines or the health department, and even then, only three sanitary napkins per month are available per girl. As a result, 84.4% of the girls reported purchasing sanitary pads from shops or markets, managing their menstrual hygiene on their own. In 4.5% of schools, sanitary pads are provided by the school management, with teachers or students contributing to the purchase of pads in some instances. Notably, even the five all-girls schools surveyed had no provisions for sanitary napkins.

The survey also highlighted significant challenges in maintaining period hygiene. **Majority of the girls (57.7%) reported difficulties, with 16.2% explicitly mentioning the absence of dustbins inside toilets, forcing them to dispose of used pads in a designated area outside the school**, often resulting in feelings of shame. The lack of water supply further complicates hygiene maintenance, particularly during menstrual periods. Broken doors, inadequate water access

inside toilets, and the absence of dustbins make it difficult for girls to change pads during school hours. Consequently, **50.6% of the girls prefer to stay home during their periods.** Additionally, 48% of the girls reported that no information is provided by the school on how to manage period hygiene. though 51.2% of the schools do organise awareness sessions on menstrual hygiene. These findings underline the urgent need for improved menstrual hygiene management facilities and education in schools to support the health and attendance of girl students.

Teachers also reported that over **50% of the girls remain absent during their periods.** Furthermore, **12.3% of schools have reported dropout cases of girls due to the lack of proper facilities in the school toilets.** These statistics highlight the urgent need for better menstrual hygiene management facilities, the lack of which can have a negative impact on girls’ education and attendance.

**Safety Concerns:**

The survey revealed significant safety concerns among the girls regarding the condition of school toilets. About 37% of the girls expressed worries about safety issues, such as broken doors or latches and the lack of lighting inside the toilets. Many also mentioned that boys often stand in groups outside the girls’ toilets, exacerbating their sense of insecurity. Additionally, **32.4% of the girls reported feeling unsafe going to the toilet alone.**



Figure 4: Safety concerns of girls in accessing toilets.

The study found that 3.8% of the girls reported broken doors or latches, and **5.1% mentioned that their toilets had no doors at all**. While 72.7% of the girls stated that the toilets were easily accessible, 26.6% reported difficulties in accessing the school toilets. Additionally, 14.9% of the girls noted that the toilets were sometimes closed during school hours. Although 78.5% of the girls indicated they could use the toilets at any time during school hours, 21.4% reported restrictions on toilet access.

**In four schools, there were no gender-segregated toilets, forcing boys and girls to use the same facilities.** Moreover, 34.4% of the girls reported to their teachers that issues such as lack of cleanliness, foul odour, unavailability of running water, unavailability of dustbins inside toilet, broken lights and doors, absence of door latches, and boys congregating in front of the toilets were significant problems. These issues, combined with an insufficient number of toilets relative to the number of students, bring attention to the urgent need for improved sanitation facilities and safety measures in schools.

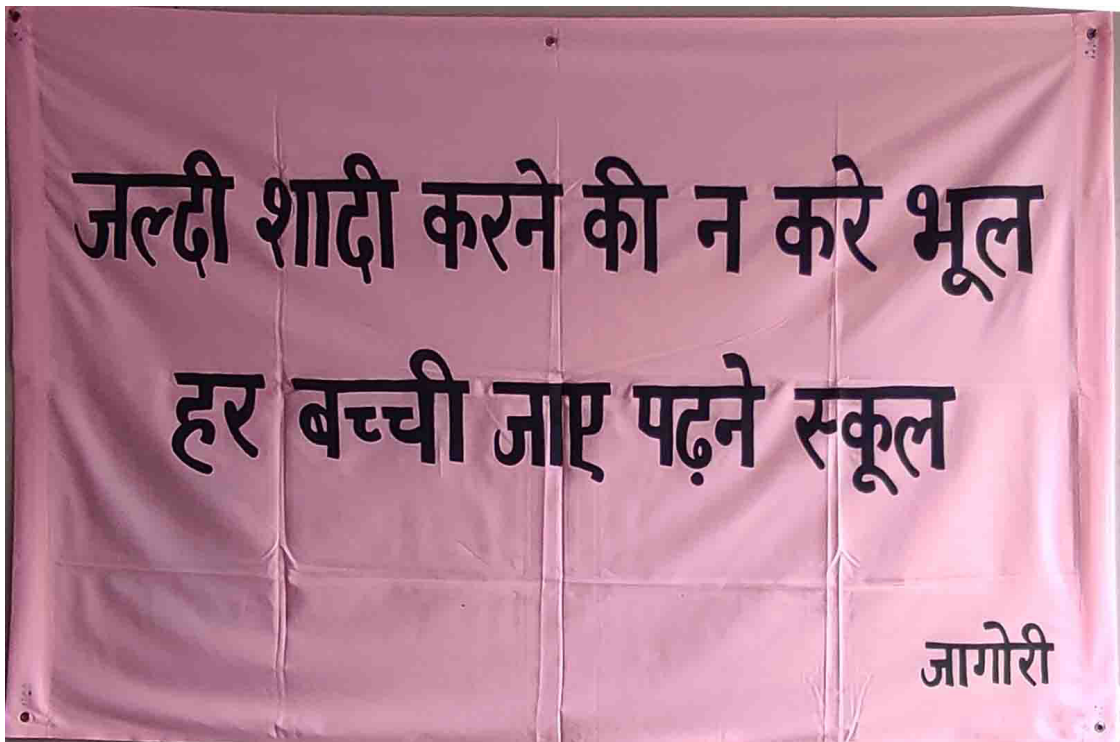
### **Conclusion:**

This report highlights the critical state of toilet facilities in schools across Jharkhand and brings attention to the impact of inadequate sanitation on girls' education. This rapid assessment uncovers issues such as poorly maintained facilities, inadequate water supply, insufficient lighting, and broken or missing doors and locks, which endanger the safety, privacy, and menstrual hygiene management of girl students. This echoes findings across the state, emphasising the profound impact of inadequate toilet access on girls' health and education – an extreme example being in Chhatra, where girls have been forced to drink less water so that they can avoid using the toilet. This not only has a health implication, but also consequences for their attendance, drop-out etc. Another example is from the Seraikela Kharsawan district, where girls are forced to defecate in the open due to only five toilets in their entire school.

It is abhorrent that this is still the situation, despite initiatives like the Swachh Vidyalaya initiative which claims to have built functional, separate and adequate toilets for girls and boys back in 2015.

The national literacy data reveals that with only 62% literacy rate among women, Jharkhand lags behind the national average of 70%. It is therefore imperative to arrest high dropout rates at secondary education levels, in order to improve the overall female literacy rate. As explained above, if issues concerning safe, accessible and functional toilets are tackled in a gender sensitive manner, it will not only have a positive impact on girls' education but a cascading impact also on early/ child marriages and early first pregnancies. As per NFHS-5 data, 48% of girls with no education were married below 18 years of age as compared to only 4% among those who attained higher education. Once girls continue with higher education, it is hoped that it will lead to prevention of early or child marriages – a serious gender concern for Jharkhand. Girls will then have better opportunities to take up meaningful employment and realise their potential.

A concerted effort to improve the school infrastructure utilising central, state and panchayat budgets is the urgent need of the hour that can lead to a model of gender sensitive policy and programming.





## **Recommendations:**

### **Recommendations based on the findings of this study are as follows:**

1. Institutionalise mechanism(s) to ensure convergence between Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and the School Development Plan for joint assessment, planning and monitoring of actions for addressing schools' needs related to toilet construction, maintenance, and provision of sanitary napkins.
2. The current School Gradation System exclusively prioritises educational quality. It is vital that the safety of school-going girls and cleanliness in schools, including toilets, are also integrated as core criteria for school gradation.
3. Schools must guarantee that girls have access to clean, safe, accessible, disability-friendly, and functional toilets proportionate to the number of girl students enrolled. It is crucial to appoint suitable cleaners, ensuring students are not tasked with cleaning of toilets. Transparency and accountability regarding funds received from Panchayat, State, or National levels for toilet facilities and maintenance are essential. Close monitoring by both the Department of Education and the Department of Women and Child Development at the district level is imperative.
4. School Management Committees (SMCs) must prioritise girls' concerns regarding safety and sanitation in their meetings, ensuring swift action. SMCs should incorporate the management and repair of toilets in the School Development Plan, which should be integrated into an online system for efficiency. Additionally, SMCs must oversee and ensure that funds allocated for toilet construction and maintenance are used solely for their designated purpose.
5. Schools and SMCs must ensure that:
  - a. Sanitary napkins are readily available for girls either through vending machines or provided by the Health Department to support menstrual hygiene. Collaborative planning should be undertaken by the Health Department, Gram Panchayat, and Education Department at the village level to ensure the availability of sanitary napkins in every school.
  - b. Safety audits are conducted at least twice a year to ensure the safety, accessibility, and functionality of toilets. These audits should be integrated into the School Development Plan and jointly monitored by the Departments of Education and Women and Child Development.



## **Budgets available for School Toilets in Jharkhand:**

Here, we outline the budget allocations under various Central, State and Panchayat schemes for the construction and maintenance of school toilets and the provision of sanitary napkins.

A: Sarva/ Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (Ref: Right to education Act, 2009 clause 22(1) about school development plans):

- i) Separate toilets for girls and boys
- ii) Each school to have 2 units (One Unit= 1 toilet & 3 urinals) Available fund for each Unit = Rs 40000/-
- iii) Cleanliness Fund for each school – Rs 10,000/per annum for 1 to 25 students, Rs 20,000/per annum for 26 to 80 students and Rs 30,000/ per annum for 81 to 120 students

B: 15th Finance Commission (Gram Panchayat Development Plan – GPDP):

Each Gram Panchayat can allocate 25% of received funds for health, cleanliness/ sanitation and livelihood purposes. This can be utilised for Schools in the Gram Panchayat area. In Jharkhand, this fund is available from 2021 till 2025.

C: Swachh Bharat Mission (Through MNREGA conversion and extension)

For Washrooms: Rs 45,000/ per unit

For Toilets: Rs 22,500/ per unit

D: Schemes and funds available for provision of Sanitary Napkins:

- i) Each village gets Rs 10,000/ for health (NHM untied fund) that can be utilised for sanitary napkins or local machine sanitary napkin manufacturing machines.
- ii) State Funds – Through 275(1) of Constitution pertaining to the Scheduled Tribes Development programme, materials can be provided for creation of PVTs cell for targeted intervention. Additionally, GPDP District and Taluka funds can be used to make sanitary napkin vending machines available.
- iii) School Management Committee Funds:
  - a) through Mission Shakti Abhiyan Rs 10,000 as cleanliness fund
  - b) at least 4% of teachers salary fund provided by the State Government can be utilised for schools.

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