

# Public Toilets for Women in Slums of Delhi

Shahana Sheikh, Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi

Women from all economic strata are affected by non availability of public toilets but the problems of those women from the lower economic strata are aggravated since they hardly have any options. The issue of public toilets affects the poorest women (who live in slum areas) the most. Other women (and all men) have options at their homes, workplace (and walls) but what about a woman in a slum area?

**Table 1: Reality check**

Name of Slum/ Resettlement Area	Ratio of latrine seats to number of women *
Kusumpur	1:500
Rajiv Camp, Jhilmil Colony	1:100
Balmiki Basti, B – Block Basti Area, Jhilmil Colony	1:20
Bawana JJ Resettlement Colony, Old Blocks	1:150
Savda Ghevra JJ Resettlement Colony	1:250

\* Assuming that 50 per cent of the population in each of the areas is women and that all the existing latrine seats in a particular area are usable.

The ratios are very different from the norms suggested. Typically, out of the 20 latrine seats in a Women's Block in a CTC (Community Toilet Complex), 4 are reserved for children; the ones for children are without a door. Due to this, the ratio is actually even more skewed in the case of women. The main points of concern are:

- Norms for latrine seats versus reality;
- Public urinals for women;
- Cases of Sexual Harassment in absence of toilets;
- Awareness on how to use a toilet.

The first priority for people from slum and resettlement colonies is to have enough to eat. Though public toilets are an issue, it is often overlooked by the people, especially women. To raise any issue and fight for it involves time, energy and money. There is a vocal lobby fighting against sexual harassment of women, but it fails to understand that the non-provision of something as basic as safe, hygienic public toilets for women is leading to many cases of sexual harassment in slum and resettlement colonies. This is an immediate need, waiting to be addressed. Taking cognizance of this study the Delhi High Court has asked the MCD to submit a report on the status of public toilets in Delhi.

*This research study was carried out during May-July 2008 during a Summer Internship at Centre for Civil Society, New Delhi*



Shahana Sheikh

A study undertaken to assess the condition of public toilets in slums and resettlement areas of Delhi reveals startling figures on the inadequate number of toilets and urinals for women.

## Norms versus reality

At the national level, most documents and policy schemes note the norm for public toilets to be 1 latrine seat for 50 people. The City Development Plan, 2006, of Delhi states that the norm according to the Environmental Improvement Scheme of Jhuggi Jhopri clusters is 1 latrine seat for 20-25 people. Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) makes different claims on the ratio of latrine seat, the figure ranging from 1 latrine seat for 20 people to one latrine seat for 150 people. Table 1 gives the actual ratio of latrine seats to number of women in the five slum and resettlement colonies of Delhi.