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Lack of public toilets an issue in Oulgaret Municipality

Priti Narayan

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PUDUCHERRY: The lack of public toilets is a cause for concern in the Oulgaret Municipality. Slum-dwellers in some areas such as Sivagami Nagar and Avvai Nagar have no easy access to public conveniences and are forced to travel long distances to reach the nearest community toilet or defecating in the open.

Recently, residents of Samipillai Thottam also appealed to the municipality for the construction of a public toilet in the area, but officials said that owing to lack of space and funds, they are unable to do so.

The Oulgaret Municipality, with a population of around 2.1 lakh, has 58 public toilets, each of which has three to six seats for men and women each. The most recent facility was built at Kottupalayam around four months ago. Officials estimate that about 20 per cent of the municipality's population needs access to public toilets. Even by a modest estimate of 30 to 50 persons per seat as requirement as per the Puducherry Town Development Plan 2007, there is a gross inadequacy of sanitation facilities within the municipality limits.

According to officials, maintenance of these few existing public conveniences is usually given to self-help groups and area-level associations. These groups are given an honorarium of Rs.1,000 a month, while the municipality takes care of faulty water connections, motors, and so on. But despite this, many of the facilities are poorly maintained.

If the respective ward members and MLAs approach the municipality for construction of public conveniences in their areas, the municipality caters for their demands, officials say. Often, lack of space is a hindering factor. Many slums are in fact, encroachments on 'poramboke' land, and too many people are crammed into a small area, making it impossible to build a facility, they claim.

Common toilets often become "no man's property," says an official of the Town and Country Planning Department. Even the government recommends building separate toilets for each house allotted by the Slum Clearance Board. These are perhaps reasons why there are not enough public toilets. Only if maintenance is taken up properly, will public toilets survive, the official says.