

Swachh Bharat biggest sanitation movement: WB

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New Delhi: India has broken the silence with a pledge to make the country open defecation free its top agenda, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said on Wednesday while the World Bank termed the government's flagship 'Swachh Bharat Mission' as the world's "biggest movement for sanitation". The observations came just a day before the Centre launches the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi, which will focus on making India free from open defecation by October next year.

"When you see the progress that we have made to reduce the burden of open defecation and ensure that everyone has access to improved sanitation, it is hard to believe that just a few years ago, the word open defecation was a taboo. But countries like India have broken that silence and made open defecation free (ODF) a political priority," UNICEF regional director Jean Gough said while addressing a convention on sanitation. Since the launch of the cleanliness mission there has been a remarkable progress, according to government data. In 2014, India had 60% of the world's total population that practised open defecation, which has now come down drastically as more than nine crore households across rural areas have got toilets.

While lauding the efforts made by India, UNICEF executive director Henrietta H

Fore said there is need to ensure that people are using toilets that are being built. "The countries and communities that have made the most progress understand the most important key to success: creating demand. Progress isn't just about 'building more toilets'. It's about making sure that people are using toilets by changing their behaviour. And that they understand why it's important for their health, and for their children's futures," she said.

Giving full credit of the campaign to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, World Bank vice president for South Asia region, Hartwig Schafer, said this is more than a sanitation mission. "It's a growth mission," he said.