

'4,000 villages are open defecation-free in state'

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AROUND 4,000 villages are now open defecation-free (ODF) in Gujarat while 36,000 women are being trained in changing traditional mindsets of their villages, in alignment with the Modi government's Swachh Bharat Mission.

Speaking at the sidelines of a seminar on 'Business opportunities in Swachh Bharat Mission' held at the Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI) here Tuesday, Jayanti S Ravi, Commissioner and Principal Secretary of Rural Development, Government of Gujarat, said, "The number (of villages) is now about 4,000 approximately; we are not yet formally declaring them as open defecation-free. These are certainly villages with 100% individual household latrines and the protocol of this programme is just starting. We are going to start this process of Nigrani Samitis (in villages) for the process of checking this programme. The total number of villages in rural Gujarat is 14,000 (gram panchayats) and out of that 4,000 of them are now open defecation-free."

Ravi spoke about her department's efforts in roping in women and community leaders in villages to change mindsets about open defecation and for



Jayanti S Ravi

construction of toilets.

"We have started a programme called Swachhata Shilpis. We have an excellent network of women self-help groups across Gujarat. So we have decided to identify one such group each from all the 18,000 villages of Gujarat and have 2 of their leaders trained. So we are talking about 36,000 women trained on 3 aspects of Swachh Bharat Grameen mission."

She said that the Swachh Bharat mission was not just a 'brick and mortar effort' to keep on constructing toilets alone, but to ensure that India becomes ODF by changing mindsets and creating more acceptability for use of toilets in the villages that form 68 per cent of India's total population. The mission trains women in social engineering and then in the actual construction of toilets and its management post construction that also help them spur enterprises and earn a livelihood.