

Accham becomes first open defecation free district in the Far West

POST REPORT

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ACCHAM became the first district in the Far-Western Region to provide toilet access to all by declaring itself Open Defecation Free (ODF) on Wednesday.

The district also became the fifth ODF district in the country after it constructed toilets in each household in all the 75 Village Development Committees (VDC).

So far, six municipalities and 750 of the total 3,995 VDCs in the country have been declared ODF.

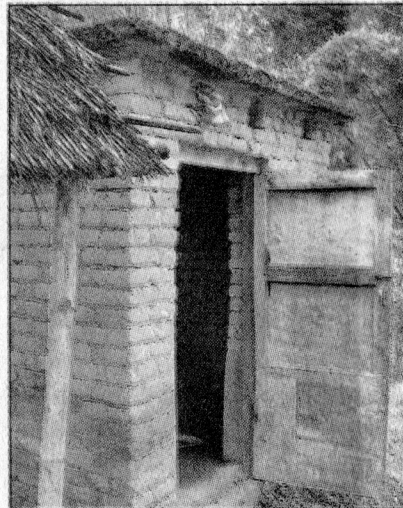
Government officials who attended a programme in Magalsen, the headquarters of Accham, on Wednesday said the declaration is a

'positive step' as the country is moving towards achieving the ambitious plan of universal access to water and sanitation services by 2017.

However, given the overall sanitation status of the country and the slow pace of work by all bodies concerned, the country is unlikely to achieve the universal target in the next four years.

The latest census shows that more than 30 percent of the country's total population still lacks access to basic sanitation facilities and are vulnerable to various diseases and epidemics all year around.

A Joint Monitoring Report prepared by the Unicef and the World Health Organisation in 2011 lists Nepal at the bottom of the sanitation status in the South Asian region.



The hygiene status

- Six municipalities and 750 of the total 3,995 VDCs have been declared ODF
- Over 3 million people still don't have access to safe drinking water and nearly 21 million are without improved sanitation
- Country unlikely to meet universal access to water and sanitation services target by 2017

In recent years, local government bodies such as municipalities, District Development Committees and VDCs in many districts, particularly in the Tarai and mid-hills, have introduced a system whereby sanitation cards are distributed to those who build toilets in their houses. A family with such a card can have access to various government services, while households without them will not be able to enjoy the facilities.

Announcement of cash awards for declaring municipalities, VDCs and DDCs as ODF areas has also encouraged local bodies and the local communities to build toilets in their houses.

"However, most of these initiatives are limited to certain places where the

local bodies have been working in coordination with partners concerned. The much-needed sanitation drive has failed to gain good momentum across the country at this moment," said Nanda Khanal, senior divisional engineer at the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage.

Anil Sthapit, a representative with the Guthi, an organisation working to improve people's access to drinking water and sanitation facilities in the Kathmandu Valley, said that given the present sanitation drive, which lacks coordination, adequate funding and harmonisation of activities conducted by different sectoral partners in various districts in the country, the sector is unlikely to see a significant progress.