



Metropolitan Sanitation Governance in India: A Case Study of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation's Achievement of 7-Star Garbage-Free City Certification under Swachh Bharat Mission—Urban

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Abstract

The Swachh Bharat Mission—Urban (SBM-U) represents India's most comprehensive national intervention aimed at achieving sustainable urban sanitation through scientific solid waste management, citizen participation, institutional accountability, and performance-based governance. Central to SBM-U is the Garbage-Free City (GFC) Star Rating Protocol introduced by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), which functions as an evidence-based certification framework for evaluating the sanitation performance of urban local bodies.

During the Swachh Survekshan 2024–25 assessment cycle, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) achieved the prestigious 7-Star Garbage-Free City certification—the highest level under the GFC framework—along with a 6th national rank among million-plus cities and Water+ certification. This paper presents an exploratory qualitative case study analysing GHMC's metropolitan sanitation transformation under SBM-U 2.0.

Keywords: Swachh Bharat Mission—Urban; Garbage-Free City; Urban Sanitation; Solid Waste Management; Municipal Governance; IEC; Behaviour Change Communication

1. Introduction

Rapid urbanization, population growth and changing consumption patterns have significantly intensified solid waste management challenges in Indian cities. Metropolitan regions in particular face complex governance constraints arising from high population density, informal settlements, infrastructure stress and institutional fragmentation.

The launch of SBM-U in 2014 marked a paradigm shift in India's urban sanitation policy moving beyond infrastructure provision toward **outcome-based governance, citizen engagement and scientific waste management**. To institutionalise accountability and sustainability MoHUA introduced the **Garbage-Free City (GFC) Star Rating Protocol** complemented by the annual **Swachh Survekshan** rankings. These mechanisms embed performance measurement, third-party verification and competitive benchmarking into municipal governance.

From a public administration perspective SBM-U reflects principles of **New Public Management**, emphasising performance indicators, certification, efficiency and evidence-based decision-making, while also incorporating behavioural public policy and urban governance approaches. Within this national context, GHMC's achievement of 7-Star GFC certification during Swachh Survekshan 2024–25 represents a landmark moment in metropolitan sanitation governance. However, systematic academic documentation of such large-scale urban success stories remains limited, particularly for million-plus cities.

This achievement is particularly significant given the administrative and demographic scale at which GHMC operates serving a population exceeding 10 million through a multi-tier municipal structure. Previous studies have noted that outcome-based sanitation governance and third-party certification mechanisms significantly improve municipal accountability (MoHUA, 2024).

2. Research Gap and Objectives

Existing literature on SBM-U and Swachh Survekshan largely focuses on descriptive rankings and infrastructure outcomes. There is limited peer-reviewed research examining metropolitan-scale compliance with the 24-indicator GFC certification framework from a governance and behavior change perspective.

The study aims to:

1. Analyse GHMC's sanitation governance framework under SBM-U
2. Examine compliance with the GFC Star Rating Protocol
3. Assess the role of IEC and citizen participation in sanitation outcomes
4. Document replicable best practices for other metropolitan cities

3. Methodology

An **exploratory qualitative case study design** was adopted to examine GHMC's sanitation transformation within its real-world metropolitan governance context.

The study is limited by its reliance on official datasets and the absence of longitudinal post-certification analysis. To enhance validity, data triangulation was ensured through cross-verification of audit findings, performance score sheets, and practitioner narratives.

3.1 Data Sources

Table 1: Data Sources Used for the Study

Sl. No.	Category	Data Source	Nature of Information
1	Primary	GHMC City Sanitation Report Cards (2024–25)	Official sanitation and SWM outcomes
2	Primary	Swachh Survekshan Score Sheets	Indicator-wise performance
3	Primary	GFC Audit Reports (MoHUA)	Compliance with 7-Star indicators
4	Secondary	Interviews with GHMC officials	Governance and operational strategies
5	Secondary	Sanitation supervisors & IEC teams	Field-level execution and BCC
6	Secondary	Media reports	Independent validation
7	Secondary	SBM-U guidelines & toolkits	National policy framework

3.3 Evaluation Framework

Table 2: Evaluation Framework and Assessment Criteria

Dimension	Assessment Focus	Measurement Approach
GFC Compliance	24 GFC indicators	MoHUA audit verification
IEC Effectiveness	Behaviour change	Segregation levels
Waste Processing	Scientific treatment	% waste processed
Cleanliness	Physical outcomes	Independent audits
Citizen Engagement	Feedback systems	Citizen Voice scores

Triangulation was employed across official documents, audits, interviews, and secondary sources.

4. Case Study Analysis: GHMC Sanitation Transformation

4.1 Governance and Administrative Framework

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation operates through a decentralised zonal and circle-level administrative structure supported by centralised digital monitoring systems. At the time of achieving the 7-Star Garbage-Free City certification, GHMC was administratively organised into 6 zones, 30 circles, and 150 municipal wards, managing sanitation services for a population exceeding 10 million across a highly complex metropolitan region.

This hybrid governance framework enables decentralised execution at the field level while ensuring uniform standards, accountability, and rapid response through centralized oversight and real-time performance monitoring.

4.2 Smart Waste Management Systems

GHMC's sanitation performance is anchored in an integrated technology-driven **Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM)** system aligned with SBM-U and the GFC protocol. GPS enabled primary collection vehicles, mechanized transfer stations, material recovery facilities, waste-to-energy plants and decentralized composting units collectively enabled **100% scientific waste processing** and elimination of open dumping.

Table 3: Key Solid and Liquid Waste Management Interventions Implemented by GHMC

Sl. No.	Intervention	Description	Functional Impact
1	GPS-enabled Swachh Auto Tippers	Primary waste collection vehicles with GPS tracking	100% door-to-door coverage and accountability
2	Integrated Transfer Stations (ITS)	Mechanized secondary waste transfer facilities	Reduced manual handling and transport time
3	Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs)	Circle-level dry waste segregation centers	Higher recycling and landfill diversion
4	Waste-to-Energy Plants	Energy recovery from non-recyclable waste	Reduced landfill dependency
5	Decentralized Composting Units	Community-level organic waste processing	Local treatment and compost generation

4.3 IEC and Behavior Change Communication

Multi-channel IEC campaigns including digital platforms, print media, radio, street plays, school outreach and door-to-door engagement resulted in **93% source segregation** significantly exceeding national urban averages. Sustained behaviour change interventions strengthened citizen ownership of waste management.

4.4 Sanitation Worker Welfare

Sanitation worker welfare formed a core pillar of GHMC's strategy, encompassing provision of personal protective equipment, health insurance, regular medical check-ups, skill development programmes and recognition initiatives such as *Swachhata Star Worker Awards*, enhancing workforce motivation and operational sustainability.

4.5 Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Partnerships with resident welfare associations, NGOs, educational institutions, NSS units, CSR partners, startups and research institutions strengthened community participation and innovation.

5. Results

Table 4: GHMC Performance Summary – Swachh Survekshan 2024–25

Sl. No	Indicator	Performance
1	National Rank (Million-Plus Cities)	6th
2	Door-to-Door Collection	100%
3	Waste Processing	100%
4	Dumpsite Remediation	100%
5	Source Segregation	93%
6	GFC Certification	7-Star
7	Water+ Certification	Achieved

Only **twelve urban local bodies nationally** achieved 7-Star GFC certification in 2024–25, underscoring GHMC’s exceptional metropolitan-scale performance.

Table 5: Urban Local Bodies Achieving 7-Star Garbage-Free City Certification in India (2024–25)

S. No.	State	District	ULB Code	Name of the Urban Local Body (ULB)	Star Rating
1	Andhra Pradesh	NTR	802969	Vijayawada	7-Star
2	Chhattisgarh	Raipur	802034	Raipur	7-Star
3	Goa	North Goa	803243	Panaji	7-Star
4	Gujarat	Ahmedabad	802484	Ahmedabad	7-Star
5	Gujarat	Surat	802629	Surat	7-Star
6	Madhya Pradesh	Bhopal	802312	Bhopal	7-Star
7	Madhya Pradesh	Indore	802273	Indore	7-Star
8	Madhya Pradesh	Jabalpur	802361	Jabalpur	7-Star
9	Maharashtra	Pune	802811	Pimpri Chinchwad	7-Star
10	Maharashtra	Thane	802788	Navi Mumbai	7-Star
11	Telangana	Hyderabad	802918	Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation	7-Star
12	Uttar Pradesh	Lucknow	800951	Lucknow Municipal Corporation	7-Star

6. Results and Discussion

GHMC’s achievement reflects the convergence of data-driven governance, decentralised execution, technology-enabled monitoring, and sustained IEC-led behaviour change communication. The case demonstrates that metropolitan complexity can be effectively managed through strong institutional capacity.

The GHMC case illustrates that metropolitan sanitation success is contingent not merely on infrastructure investment but on the institutionalisation of behavioural governance through IEC, supported by digital monitoring and decentralised accountability.

7. Conclusion

GHMC's 7-Star Garbage-Free City certification marks a historic milestone in India's urban sanitation journey. The study offers replicable insights for metropolitan cities under the SBM-U framework.

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