

IIT alumni group takes on Centre over toilets data, moves HC

Written by [Aamir Khan](#) | Mumbai | February 16, 2015 2:59 am

In June 2012 at Houston, Texas, the 1969 batch of IIT, Bombay, debated India and Indian education eventually encouraging the 30 alumni at the meet to form a group to engage with policy making in India. This past week, the IIT Graduates' Advocacy Organisation (IGAO) set the ball rolling with a PIL in the Bombay High Court on discrepancies between the Government of India's official data and the "real" number of toilets in the schools of Akola district, Maharashtra

IGAO, with former IITians as members, now has a seven-member steering committee across the world. While the group's president Dr Jayant Sathaye, a member of the Nobel Prize winning team on climate change in 2008, is based in Berkeley, US, its policy expert Dr Shashi Enarth contributes from Hyderabad. The group's executive vice-president Sharad Wagle heads the India chapter from Mumbai. The decision on IGAO's first PIL was taken after the group's committee director Dr Yogi Agarwal, who shuttles between Seattle and his hometown Akola, found a "desperate need" to build toilets back home.

Agarwal, who has been working on education and water in Akola since 2000, invited a group of 21 Americans to visit Akola in 2008 to view his work. "We took the group to village Gonapur, around 20 km north of Akola, to see the site of our project. It had turned dark at the time of our return. While passing through a village, the headlights fell on two figures squatting on the side of the road... The figures were old women defecating in darkness," Dr Agarwal says. Appalled that a basic necessity were missing, he secured a grant from a rotary club and set about building 230 toilets in the village. A complex set of issues form the backbone of IGAO's first PIL. Firstly, the litigation, filed through the Human Rights Law Network, accuses the government of not complying with several orders of the Supreme Court. Citing clauses in the Bureau of Indian Standards of Basic Requirements for Water Supply, Drainage and Sanitation, the group stresses the need for one urinal for every 20 students and one drinking fountain for every 50 students.

"Data from the Zila Parishad shows one or no toilets in schools. Despite this reality, (Centre's) District Information System for Education categorises this district to have 96 per cent of schools in compliance with RTE laws. The picture would be no different in other states," says Dr Wagle. The group pegs India's need for toilets at about 200 million, and says a mere one millionth of the total have been built so far. And Prime Minister Narendra Modi may not find enough money — around Rs 3,000 billion — for accomplishing the goal, says Dr Agarwal.

Next on the agenda is emphasising the need for high quality primary education, says Devendra Gautam, IGAO member and an IIT Kanpur alumnus based in Delhi. "Connecting with policy makers and implementers on the grass root as well as higher levels to figure out the gaps is our objective," says Gautam.

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