



# ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC TOILETS IN THIMPHU 2025

A CASE STUDY REPORT

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Thank you all for your contributions toward the vision of safe, equitable, and accessible public sanitation.

*Ter Consulting Firm*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bhutan declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) status in the year 2022 which means that every household have access to independent and improved toilet<sup>1</sup>. While this is a significant achievement, there is a need for continued effort to raise the service standards throughout the entire sanitation service chain to sustain the ODF result and attain safe, equitable and sustainable sanitation facilities and services. Thus, providing adequate public toilets that is safe and accessible to all in strategic public places require planning attention and investment.

There are increasing advocacy efforts from community and civil society organizations on the need of accessible public toilets in cities focusing on vulnerable social groups such as people with disabilities, women and children. To address such emerging needs as per the core principal of 2030 of 2030 agenda for sustainable development 'leave no one behind', National Public Toilet Guideline, 2020 was endorsed by the government. The guideline provides the comprehensive detail on structural design and safety features and related aspects of public toilets. However, there is no assessment report of existing public toilets in urban centers around Bhutan. Thus, this is first ever public toilet assessment conducted for public toilets in Thimphu City to understand the current status in the area of safety, equity and sustainable sanitation services.

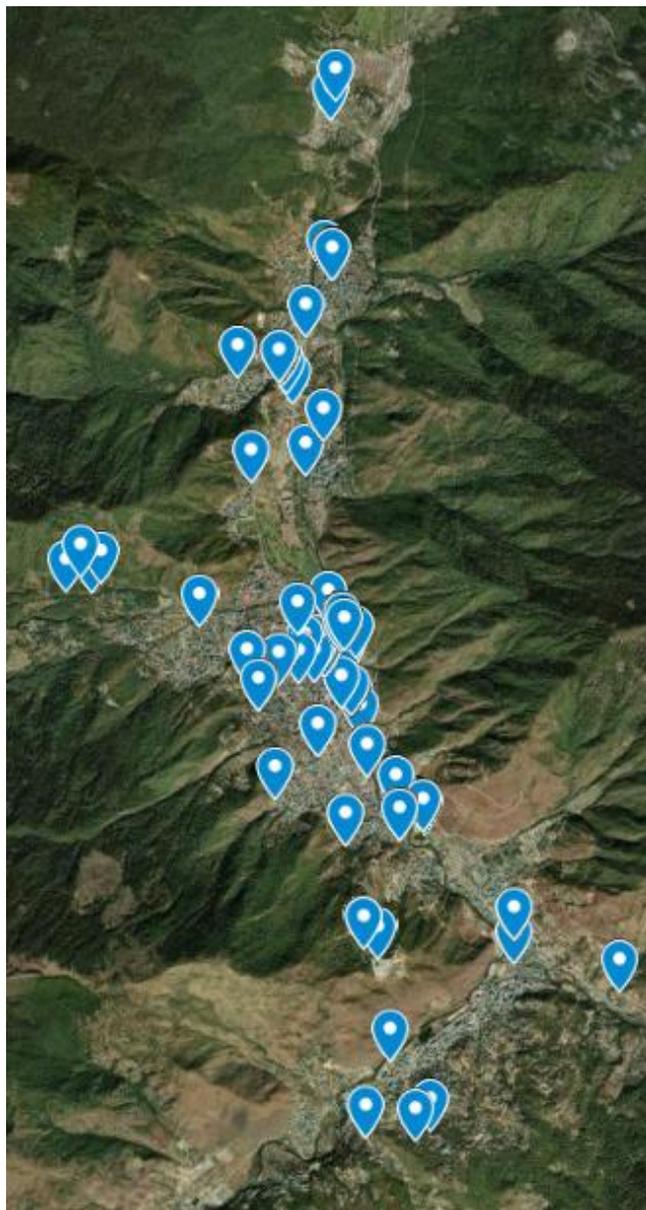


Figure 1. Spread of Public Toilet in Thimphu City

### 1.1 OBJECTIVES

- To assess the accessibility, safety, and functionality of public toilet facilities in Thimphu City.
- To provide practical recommendations for the sustainable operation and maintenance of these facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Improved Toilet – As means pour flush toilet as per the UNCIEF JMP standard

## 2. BACKGROUND

The Sewer Section under Thimphu Thromde and Bhutan Toilet Organization in have been closely working together to improve the sanitation services in Thimphu city through various programs such as piloting decentralized treatment plants, capacity building of sanitation workers and developing relevant guidelines. This toilet assessment is a part of the Joint Action Plan 2025 between Thimphu Thromde and BTO conducted with the aim to understand current status of public toilets that will contribute in evidence-based planning for improvement of the sanitation services. The assessment explores key themes including gender and disability inclusion, hygiene and safety features, environmental and public health risks, and sustainable operations.

### 2.1 DEFINITION AND SCOPE

For the purpose of this assessment, public toilets are defined as facilities constructed and managed by Thimphu Thromde in key public locations, including:

1. **Transit Areas** - Toilets near junctions, bus stops, bypasses, and roadside rest points.
2. **Public Facilities** - Toilets located in public parks and sports complexes.
3. **Market Areas** - Toilets within vegetable market sheds

## 3. DATA COLLECTION

Six enumerators were recruited for the assessment of public toilets in Thimphu. BTO provided the orientation on sanitation service chain, safely managed sanitation and National Public Toilet Guideline 2020, before they were deployed for the assessment in the field. The quantitative questionnaire was developed and Kobotoolbox was used for data collection.



### 3.1 PROJECT TOWN:

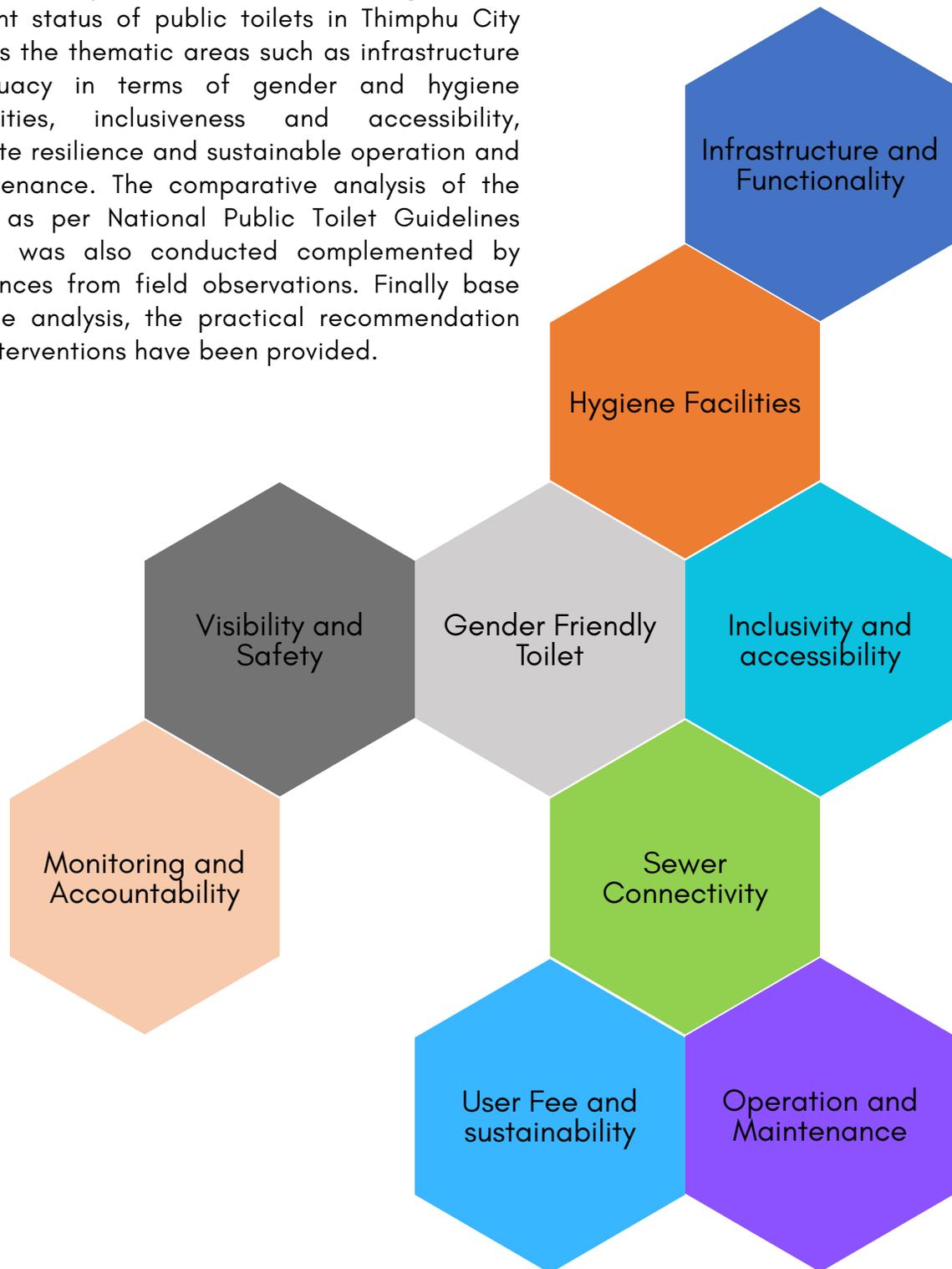
Thimphu Thromde is the municipal body and the capital city of Bhutan. It is the largest city in the country covering area of 26 square kilometers. The city is located at an altitude ranging from 2,248 meters (7,375 feet) to 2,648 meters (8,668 feet) above sea level and extends in a north-south direction along the Wangchhu river valley. The city's rapid urbanization and modernization reflect its evolving role as the heart of Bhutan's development while balancing tradition with progress.

Thimphu City was selected as the project site for Bhutan's first comprehensive public toilet assessment based on its status as the most populous urban center with the highest concentration of public sanitation facilities. As the capital and the country's oldest and most developed city, Thimphu is frequently regarded as a benchmark for infrastructure development and urban management among other Thromdes and emerging urban centers. Given its scale of usage and strategic importance, Thimphu provides a valuable reference point for understanding urban sanitation challenges and solutions. The selection was therefore made with the intent to generate insights and lessons that can be replicated across other urban centers to enhance public toilet standards nationwide.



## 4. ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

This section presents the detail findings of the current status of public toilets in Thimphu City across the thematic areas such as infrastructure adequacy in terms of gender and hygiene amenities, inclusiveness and accessibility, climate resilience and sustainable operation and maintenance. The comparative analysis of the data as per National Public Toilet Guidelines 2022 was also conducted complemented by evidences from field observations. Finally base on the analysis, the practical recommendation for interventions have been provided.



## 4.1 INFRASTRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONALITY

For this assessment 44 public toilets were assessed in Thimphu city. It was found that three public facility toilets were non-operational due to lack of ownership and proper manager/caretaker. Those toilets are: public facility toilet at Motithang Ozon Park, Changangkha, Ecological Park and Dechencholing open gym.

The assessment recorded the total of 100 toilet cubicles and 64 urinals for male and 115 toilet cubicles for female. It was found that 16 toilet cubicles are non-functional due to blockage and lack of continues running water.



Figure 2. Number operational and non-operational toilets

Market Toilet	Public Facility	Transit Area Toilet
17	20	7

Table 1. Categories of Public Toilets

Sanitary Unit	For Male	For Female
<b>Toilet cubicles / water closet</b>	One per 100 persons up to 400 persons; for over 400 users, add at the rate of one per 250 persons or part thereof.	Two for 100 persons up to 200 persons; over 200 add at the rate of one per 100 persons or part thereof.
<b>Urinals</b>	One for 50 persons or part thereof.	Nil.
<b>Wash basins</b>	One per two toilet cubicles/ water closet.	
<b>Toilet</b>	Public gathering (Located at a distance of 30 meters from gallery). One per 300 persons.	One per 200 persons.
<b>Toilet</b>	Public gathering dwellers (Located at a distance of 10 meters from dwelling). One per 40 persons.	One per 25 persons.

Table 3. User to Toilet Unit Ratio (NPTG, 2021)

Based on the user-to-toilet unit ratio outlined in the National Public Toilet Guideline 2021 (see Table 3), Thimphu city currently has an adequate number of toilet cubicles to serve its population of 55,555 females and 58,996 males, with a population density of 4,406 people per square kilometer, according to the National Statistics Bureau’s 2017 data. The existing number of cubicles aligns with the recommended ratio of one toilet per 100-400 persons for both females and males. However, this standard does not apply uniformly in all situations; user-toilet ratios for events and gatherings differ as specified by the guideline. Although Thimphu has sufficient toilet units overall, inadequacies arise due to the absence of toilets in strategic locations such as public gathering spots and transit areas frequently used by commuters.

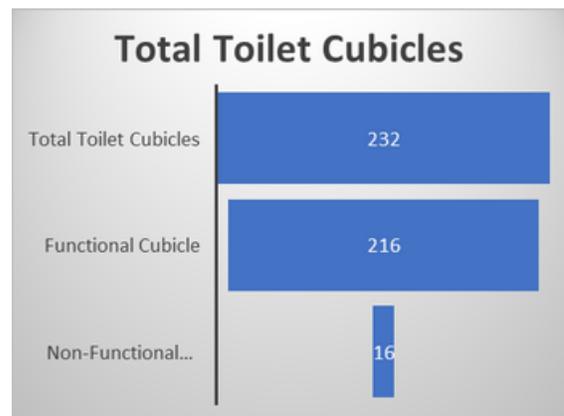
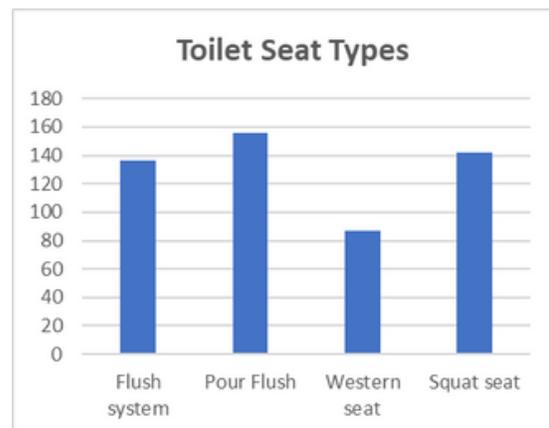


Figure 4. Number of functional and non-functional toilet cubicles



7 percent of public toilets in Thimphu are non-operational. The non-operational toilets are as follows:

- The public facility toilet at Motithang Ozon Park
- The public facility toilet at Changangkha, Ecological Park
- The public facility toilet at Dechencholing open gym.

## 4.2 HYGIENE FACILITIES

It is important to equip the public toilets with adequate hygiene facilities for better hygiene practices from hand washing to menstrual hygiene management. There is adequate wash basin for hand washing purpose in the public toilets however 76 % of toilets do not have health faucet (bidets) for washing. Furthermore, the plumbing provision to fit bidets are also found lacking in most of the toilet cubicles.

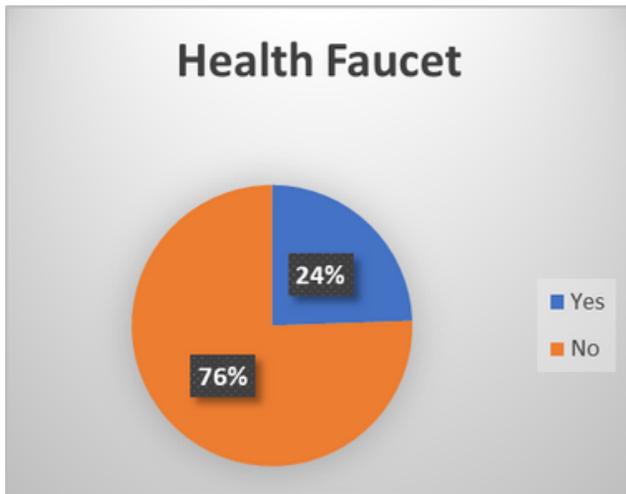


Figure 5. Percentage of health faucet

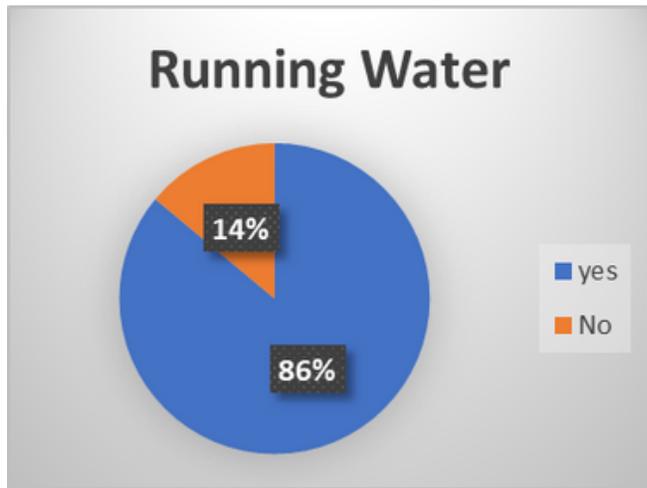


Figure 8. Percentage of continuous running water

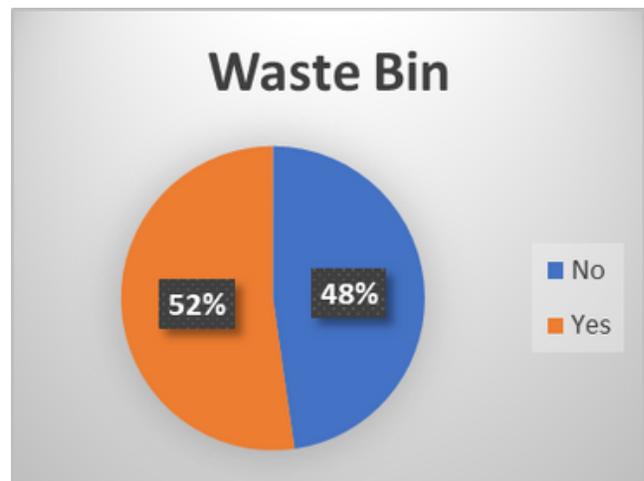


Figure 7. Waste bin in Toilets

At the time of the assessment, 86% of public toilet was observed to have continuous running water. At least 5 toilets lacked continuous running water. Only 52 % of toilets has general waste bin. The common solid waste such as plastic litter and cigarette buds were observed in the toilet surroundings. Due to the prohibition of smoking in public places and without designated smoking places, smokers often use public toilets.

There was adequate wash basin for public toilets with running water for hand washing purpose. Only 14 out of 135 wash basins was found non-functional. Majority of toilet seats are squat type compared to the western seat.

The cleanliness of toilet pot, wash basin, mirror, wall and toilet floor were evaluated. Majority of Toilet pots were found clean however, there is significant number of toilet pot that are dirty. Similarly, most of wash basin were found clean while substantial numbers of wash basin was found dirty. The toilet walls were found mostly clean. Comparatively the mirror in the public toilets are found dirty.

The toilet floor however was found mostly wet which risks the users. More than half (53%) of toilet with the dedicated cleaners was kept wet during the time of assessment.

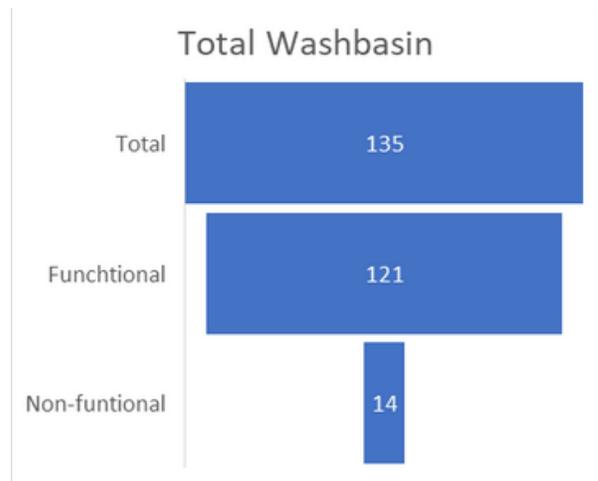
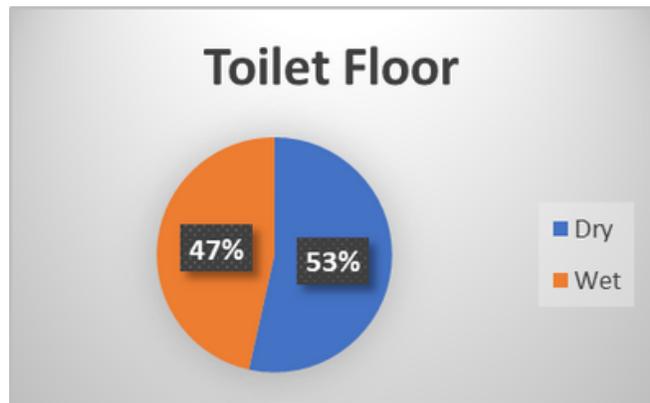


Figure 6. Number of Functional and non-functional Washbasin



Figure 9. Cleanliness of Public Toilets



**Recommendations:**

- There is no clarity of the ownership for those non-operational toilets thus, Thromde should come out clear SoP on public toilet management within the Thromde jurisdiction.
- Installation of hygiene facilities such as health faucet and waste bin require urgent attention and budget allocation.
- Toilet managers should maintain the proper checklist for daily toilet cleaning to ensure all parts of toilet are cleaned.
- Yearly maintenance assessment system needs to be put in place to ensure adequate allocation for resource.
- Designated smoking area within public toilet will help prevent from smoking inside

### 4.3 VISIBILITY AND SAFETY

There are major issues with proper and visible signage for public toilets. Most public toilets are located in isolated places with limited public visibility. While 54% of public toilets have no signage at all, 30% have signage that is not clearly visible. Only 16% of public toilets have clear and visible signage indicating the direction to the toilet.

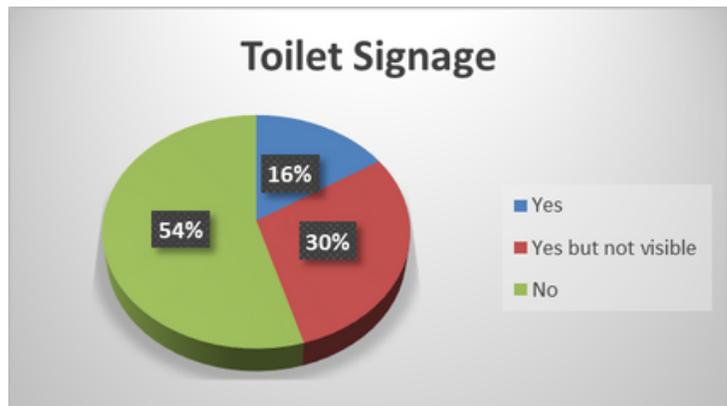


Figure 10. Proper signage of toilets

Based on the average daily user fee collected by 22 toilets, it is estimated that over 1600 people avail public toilet facilities daily. However, there are 21 toilets without user fee record because they are either free of charge or without caretakers on the day of assessment. Therefore, the daily footfall could be at least double that of the estimated 1600 derived from 22 toilets.



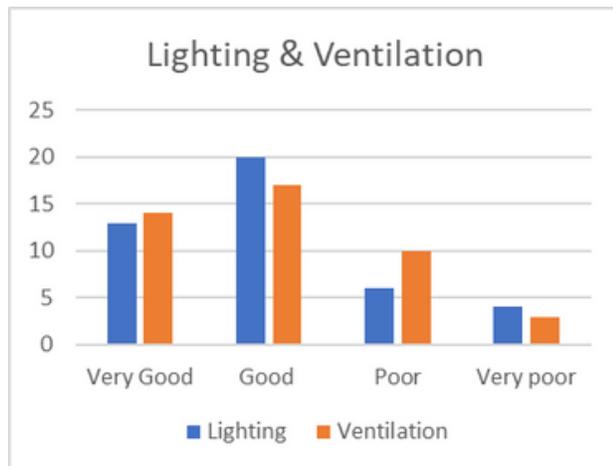


Figure 12. Proper lighting and ventilation

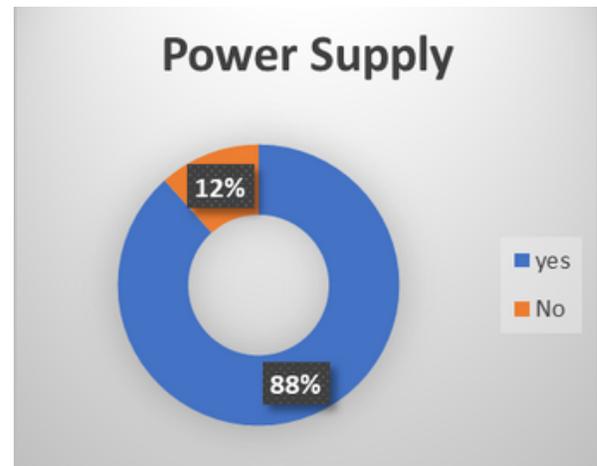


Figure 11. Continues Power Supply

With almost 88% of toilets with continues power, the public toilets have adequete lighting when needed. However ther was no natural lighting provision by using alternatives such as transparent roof. Similarly the ventilation are mostly well build to dispel odor and prevent insects.

#### Recommendations:

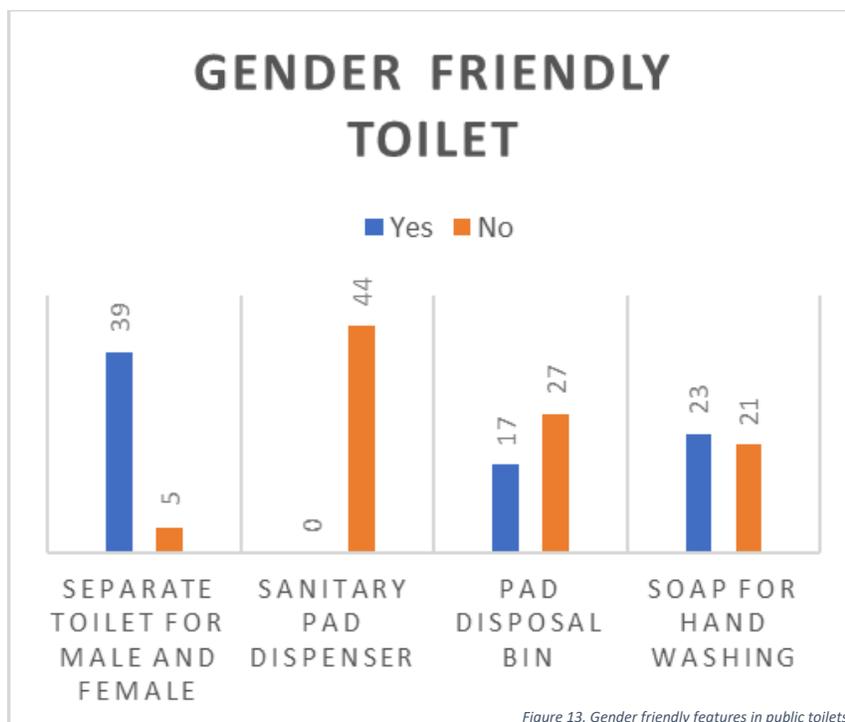
- The physical signage with a common design needs to be placed in the strategic spot for visibility.
- Initiate digital mapping of all the public toilets to access from google maps.
- It is recommended to use energy efficient transparent roofing material for natural lighting in public toilets.

## 4.4 GENDER FRIENDLY TOILET

Out of the 44 toilets assessed, 39 had separate facilities for males and females. For a toilet to be menstrual hygiene-friendly, it should have a sanitary pad disposal bin, a handwashing facility with soap, and, if possible, access to sanitary pads within the facility.

During the assessment, it was found that at least 17 toilets were menstrual hygiene-friendly, equipped with sanitary pad disposal bins, and 23 toilets had handwashing facilities with soap. However, none of the facilities had pad dispensers for women to access sanitary pads during emergencies.

It was also noted that none of the facilities had diaper changing stations or baby-holding features to support young parents using the toilets while accompanied by their infants.



### Recommendations:

- Ensure that toilet operator provide separate sanitary pad disposal bin in all female toilet cubicles.
- Thromde to regulate frequently on hygiene facilities such as soap for handwashing for all time.
- Install sanitary pad dispenser in priority area toilets.
- All public toilet should use common gender signage.
- Install Diaper Station and Baby Holding features

## 4.5 INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

The accessibility features for vulnerable social groups were assessed in all toilet cubicles. While there are an adequate number of toilet cubicles and urinals for general users, only five cubicles were found to be user-friendly for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). Additionally, none of the public toilets had child-friendly toilet pans or urinals. Similarly, no diaper changing stations or baby-holding features were found in any of the facilities.

In terms of accessibility features such as ramps, grab bars, and tactile indicators, the majority of public toilets lacked these essential elements. About 93% of public toilets did not have signage for Persons with Disabilities. Only 11% of public toilets had handrails to support senior citizens and individuals with physical disabilities. Furthermore, 93% of toilets lacked grab bars within the cubicles, and 98% had no tactile guides for visually impaired users.

Accessibility features were found to be severely lacking in most public toilets, clearly affecting vulnerable social groups. There is an urgent need to prioritize the development of inclusive and accessible public toilets for all.

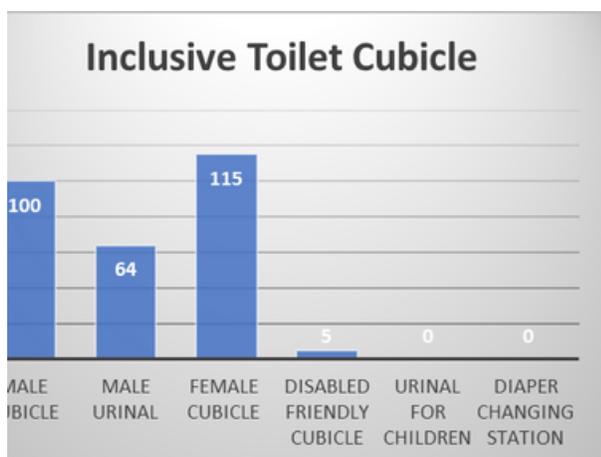


Figure 14. Disabled friendly public toilets

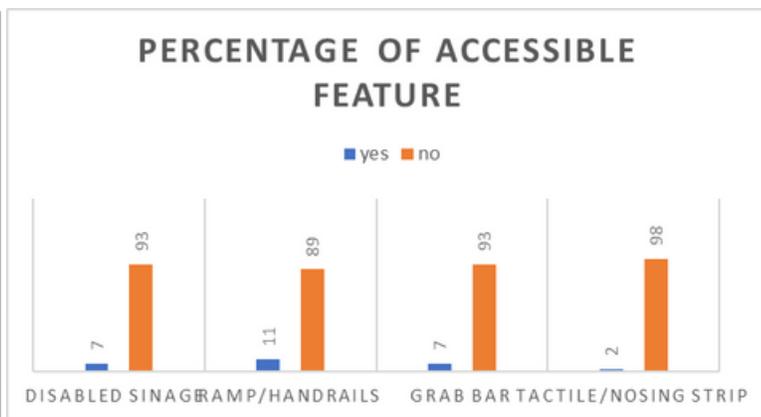


Figure 16. Accessible features in public toilets

### Recommendations:

- Convert at least one toilet cubicle into a disabled friendly toilet in all public toilets
- At least install one urinal for children in all public toilets
- Feature such as grab bar, ramp, door size, tactiles needs to considered.
- Baby holder and diaper changing station is recommended in priority area toilets



## 4.6 SEWER CONNECTIVITY

While half of the public toilet are connected to sewer network and remaining half rely on onsite sanitation. Many of these onsite sanitations do not have proper septic tank with soak pit. Likewise, most of the septic tanks are not accessible by the cesspool truck for emptying septage.

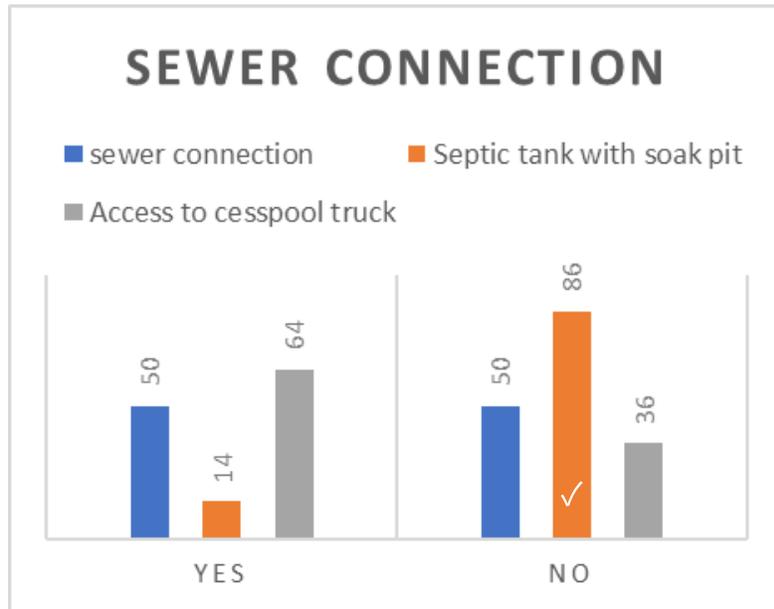


Figure 15. Sewer access and septic tank conditions

### Recommendations:

- Most of the septic tanks do not have proper soak pit, thus Thromde should upgrade into proper standard septic Tank as per Septic Tank Manual, 2013.
- Thromde should subsidize the emptying service for regular emptying of septage

## 4.7 OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Various models are employed for toilet operations, including private companies, individuals, and Thimphu Thromde. Currently, 45% are managed by private firms. There are 41 caretakers, of whom 30 are women. Some toilets lack a designated caretaker, and many lack utility rooms for storing cleaning materials.

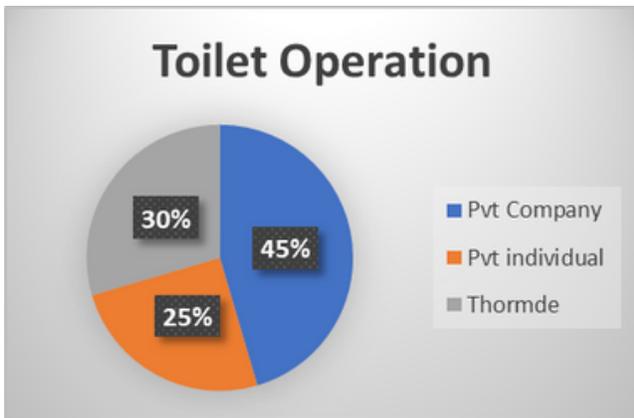


Figure 19. Types of toilet operation model



Figure 17. Number of Toilet Managers

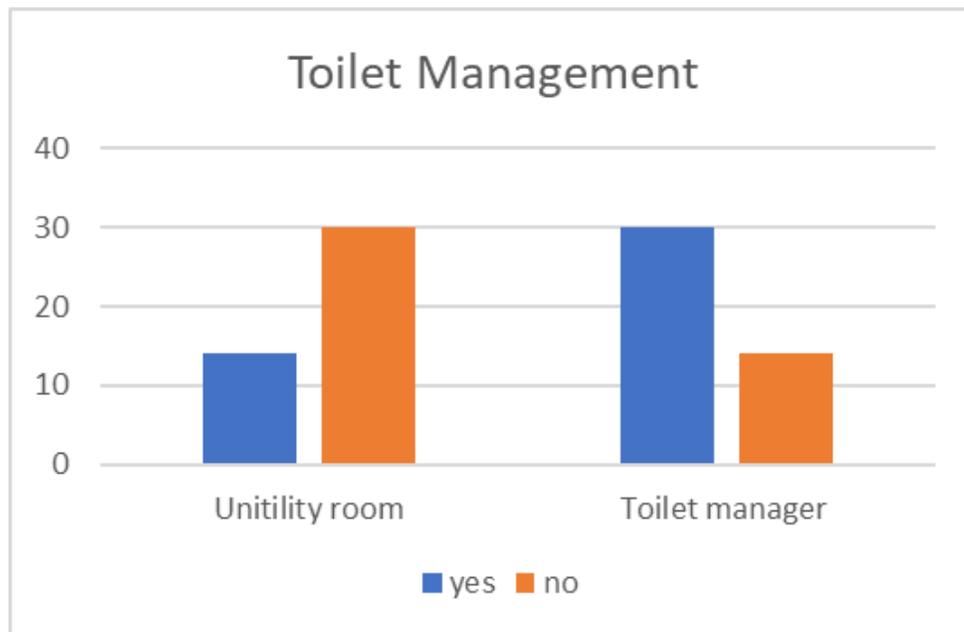
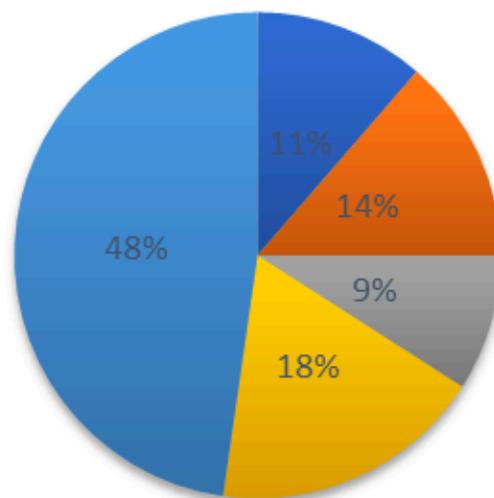


Figure 18. Utility room and toilet manager

## 4.8 MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

It is important to ensure compliance and maintain high standards in accordance with the agreed terms and existing regulations. However, current monitoring practices are inconsistent. Only 48% of public toilets are monitored weekly, 14% monthly, 9% bi-annually, and 18% annually, while 11% are not monitored at all. This lack of regular and standardized inspection results in nearly half of the toilets receiving minimal oversight, which significantly undermines compliance with safety and hygiene standards.

### Toilet Monitoring



■ weekly ■ monthly ■ bi-annually ■ annually ■ not at all

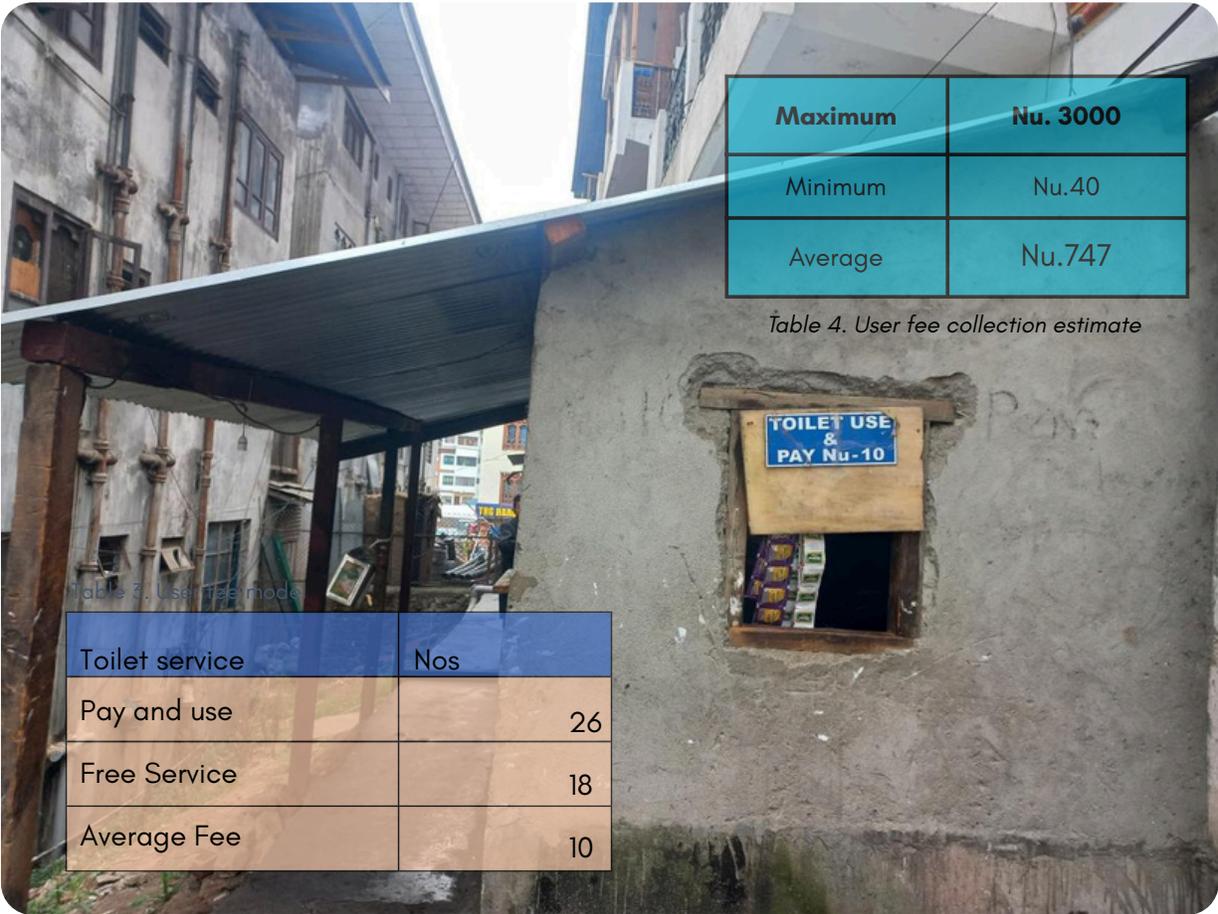
Figure 20. Frequency of toilet monitoring

#### Recommendations:

- Institute a joint monitoring system involving both the operator and the regulator to oversee public toilet management at an agreed frequency.
- Build the capacity of private companies on national standards and guidelines related to public toilet management.
- Initiate regular independent monitoring of public toilets, supported by clear guidelines and a standardized evaluation system.
- Ensure that every public toilet has an adequate number of trained toilet managers.
- Require every public toilet to have a designated utility room for cleaning and maintenance purposes.
- Ensure toilet managers are properly trained and equipped with appropriate uniforms and safety gear.

#### 4.9 USER FEE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Out of the 44 toilets assessed, 26 operate on a pay-and-use model, while 18 provide free services. The paid toilets charge Nu. 10 per use. Daily income ranges from Nu. 40 to Nu. 3,000, depending on location and footfall. The revenue generated typically covers minor maintenance and caretaker salaries but is insufficient for major repairs or upgrades. There is potential to optimize the user fee structure to cross-subsidize underperforming facilities and ensure more sustainable operations.



Maximum	Nu. 3000
Minimum	Nu.40
Average	Nu.747

Table 4. User fee collection estimate

Table 3. User fee mode

Toilet service	Nos
Pay and use	26
Free Service	18
Average Fee	10

**Recommendations;**

- Explore revenue generation opportunities by allocating small spaces within or near public toilets for cafés or kiosks to help cover maintenance costs.
- Introduce innovative revenue models, such as offering promotional or advertising space, to support the financial sustainability of public toilet operations.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This assessment provides critical insights into the current state of public toilets in Thimphu, highlighting both notable achievements and persistent challenges. While infrastructure coverage has improved and collaboration among stakeholders is commendable, significant gaps remain. Many public toilets lack inclusivity, accessibility, and sustainable management. Inadequate facilities for persons with disabilities, absence of gender-sensitive amenities, poor signage, and limited monitoring threaten the effectiveness, equity, and dignity of public sanitation services.

To sustain Bhutan's Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and advance toward the goal of safely managed sanitation for all, it is imperative that Thimphu Thromde and its partners:

- Prioritize investments in inclusive, gender-responsive, and child-friendly toilet infrastructure.
- Strengthen monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms to ensure service quality.
- Adopt sustainable operation and maintenance models, including innovative revenue streams.
- Improve sewer connectivity and fecal sludge management systems for environmental and public health safety.

A concerted and strategic approach will be key to transforming public toilets from basic infrastructure into inclusive, dignified, and sustainable public services.

## Annex I. List of public toilets assessed

Sl.No	Local Area	Specific Toilet Location	Year	Toilet Type	Operational
1	Core Town	Kaja Throm (upper floor)	2024	Market Toilet	Yes
2	Core Town	Kaja throm (down floor)	2024	Market Toilet	Yes
3	Core Town	Kaja Throm (left)	2024	Market Toilet	Yes
4	Core Town	Kaja Throm(ground floor) right side	2024	Market Toilet	Yes
5	Babesa	Royal Botanical Garden(Serbithang)	unknown	Public Facility	Yes
6	Dechencholing	Dangrina park	2019	Public Facility	Yes
7	Babesa	Royal Botanical Garden (Serbithang) Inside the park		Public Facility Toilet	Yes
8	Motithang	Takin zoo (near Takin cafe)	2024	Public Facility	Yes
9	Babesa	City bus parking near RTC junction	2024	Public Facility	Yes
10	Babesa	Sabji Bazaar, Babesa truck parking area.	2019	Market Toilet	Yes
11	Motithang	Takin zoo ( near picnic spot)	2024	Public Facility	Yes
12	Motithang	Takin zoo ( near canopy)	2024	Public Facility	Yes
13	Motithang	Takin zoo ( near Shau Kiosk cafe)	2024	Public Facility	Yes
14	Taba	Taba vegetable market	2021	Market Toilet	Yes
15	Olokha	Chinese line(next to fly over)		Transit Area Toilet	Yes
16	Jungzhina	Jungshina vegetable market	2022	Market Toilet	Yes
17	Changzamtok	Near fly over bridge( vegetable		Market Toilet	Yes
18	Changbangdu	Changbangdu Vegetable market		Market Toilet	Yes
19	Changzamtok	Changyul park(centre)	2024	Public Facility	Yes
20	Changzamtok	Changyul park (left)	2024	Public Facility	Yes
21	Simtokha	Simtokha view point	2024	Transit Area Toilet	Yes
22	Core Town	Near RICBL office		Transit Area Toilet	Yes
23	Core Town	City bus parking public toilet		Transit Area Toilet	Yes
24	Core Town	Norzin lam vegetable market ( behind norling building: meat shop)		Market Toilet Public Facility	Yes
25	Core Town	Coronation park (Tow ards Lungtenzampa)		Public Facility Toilet	Yes
26	Hejo	Hejo Dhuetrae		Public Facility	Yes
27	Hejo	Hejo vegetable market	2017	Market Toilet	Yes
28	Core Town	Vegetable market		Market Toilet	Yes
29	Chubachu	Handicraft toilet		Public Facility	Yes
30	Core Town	Lungten Zampa Bus Terminal		Transit Area Toilet	Yes
31	Changzamtok	Kala Bazer ( slump area)		Public Facility	Yes
32	Changangkha	Chang zeri Vegetable market	2020	Market Toilet	Yes
33	Langjophakha	Ludrong memorial garden	2015	Public Facility	Yes
34	Changangkha	Swimming pool roundabout Underpass		Transit Area Toilet	Yes
35	Zilukha	Zilukha vegetable market near		Market Toilet	Yes
36		Thai Temple		Public Facility	Yes
37	Changzamtok	Buddha Point( down stairs)	2008	Public Facility	Yes
38	Core Town	Chupha kha (garment shops)	2007	Market Toilet	Yes
39	Changangkha	Near BCCI underpass		Transit Area Toilet	Yes
40	Core Town	Memorial Chortoen		Public Facility	Yes
41	Kaw ajangsa	Above BTO office		Market Toilet	Yes
42	Motithang	Ozone park	2017	Public Facility	No
43	Changangkha	Ecological Park	2016	Public Facility	No
44	Dechencholing	Dangrina open gym		Public Facility	No



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