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**WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES BEYOND 2015:  
IMPROVING ACCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

## **Supplementing government initiatives for universal access to sanitation through a district-wide approach**

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*This paper describes the model of District<sup>i</sup> Wide Approach that WaterAid is following in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh as a model for universal coverage of sanitation. The Government of India has a political commitment to meet the universal access to sanitation target by 2019. However, the past experience of nearly three decades very clearly show that there are several hurdles and gaps that needs to be overcome to ensure that this happens. We believe that universal access can happen and it can happen if efforts are put in to strengthen the existing government mechanisms and through networking with multi-stakeholders on the agenda of sanitation. In Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, we have attempted district wide approach using six broad components – IEC/BCC, Capacity building, Rights based approach, Influencing policies, strengthening governance systems and demonstration especially to address vulnerabilities.*

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### **Introduction**

In a country like India, ensuring universal access to WASH has been major concern. Although several efforts have been made in this direction, it has yet to translate into desired outcome. The most recent global information on access to water and sanitation provided by WHO and UNICEF monitoring update 2014 clearly shows that while there have been some remarkable progress in access to water in India, the progress on sanitation is far behind the desired outcomes. As per the 2014 update, around 48 per cent of estimated population in India still practice open defecation compared to only around 14 per cent worldwide. This compels policymakers and practitioners to rethink about the strategy and approach being applied towards ensuring safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene to every one everywhere. Global agencies such as WaterAid, UNICEF have set targets to achieve universal access to WASH by 2030. However, recently, the Indian government has set an ambitious target of ‘clean India’ by 2019 going a step further. Now, the question arises what would be the operational mechanism in order to achieve this target. In this context, this paper examines the gaps in current approach and attempts to provide some operating principals that are being applied by WaterAid India in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in India.

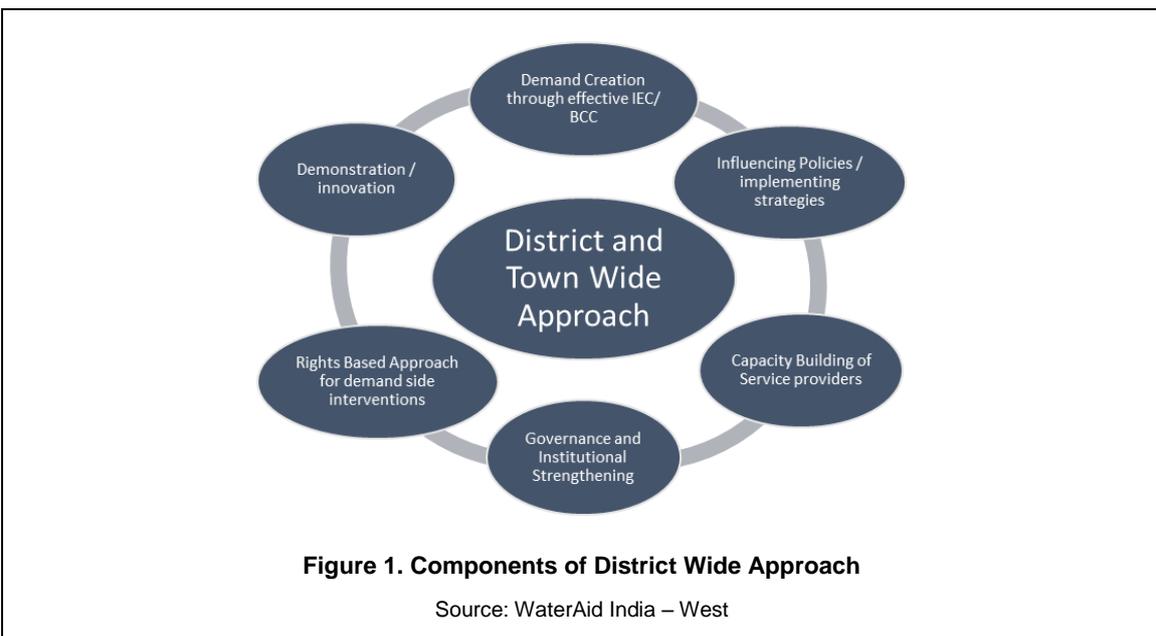
### **Government's approach and gaps in implementation**

As mentioned above, in the last few months, the focus on sanitation has increased significantly. Of course this is not to say that it was not in the agenda of the government earlier. But after declaring it as a national priority by the central government announcing ‘Swachh Bharat Abhiyan’, a sanitation programme dedicated to creating clean India by 2019 as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary, everybody is talking about sanitation. As a result, a clear shift in priority towards sanitation can be seen in the state government's programme particularly around sanitation. This is a welcome step considering the alarming situation. But this declaration of the government seems a political statement with very little thinking on how it will be achieved. It is important to note here that there have been sanitation schemes since 1986 and yet India has almost 50% population defecating in the open. The government's response has been to declare yet another scheme with yet another deadline. This time the deadline is even tougher as compared to global

thinking of 2030 for achieving universal access as mentioned above. Some of the key challenges that might affect the overall efforts of achieving universal access to safe sanitation are discussed below:

- Focus on infrastructure- It is well established that merely construction of toilets has not been able to improve the status of sanitation. Behaviour change communication plays an equally important role in improving the sanitation but it is observed that this aspect has not been addressed properly. It is likely that the focus would be more on creating infrastructure in order to meet the target which would not be enough to achieve the desired outcome. Although the state has a clear plan and budget for this, its effectiveness remains a problem in many parts of the state.
- Lack of inter-departmental coordination- Another important area which is often not considered is coordination between the different departments such as education, health and women and child development. It is well established that lack of sanitation impacts the other sectors of development such as education, health, and livelihood and poses serious challenge to the overall development of the country. Many reports have highlighted its intrinsic links to other areas of development. But unfortunately, this aspect has not been dealt clearly either at policy level or in practice.
- Lack of human resource- Lack of human resource particularly at district and sub district level is another area of concern. A huge gap between staff in position and staff required at these levels can be seen. Inadequate staffing may hamper the progress at implementation level. It may be noted that community volunteers have been identified at village level to take the agenda of sanitation forward but capacity of these volunteers is a major worry and this exacerbates the problem further. Although different capacity enhancement programmes are organized time to time for them, its quality and effectiveness remain an issue and usefulness of these programmes hardly reflect at implementation level.
- Issues of equity and Inclusion- Although effort of the government is to make sanitation for all, it hardly explains how equity and inclusion aspect will be dealt in practice particularly in planning and implementation. Inability to identify or relate to the issues of equity and inclusion among the staff can be observed at different levels and it might be possible that the groups, who have been deprived and marginalised, do not get proper attention.
- Local context missing- One of the major issues that is often ignored is giving due attention to the local context in planning and implementation. It is seen that the government applies a standard approach everywhere and we all know that it may be problematic for heterogeneous country like India. For example, a standardised design of toilet is imposed everywhere which would not work at every place. Similarly, same method of behaviour change cannot be applied everywhere. In other words, there is a little scope of variations in the approach being applied by the government which might not satisfy the needs of community.

### Learnings from District Wide Approach in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisagrh



Recognizing the above mentioned gaps, WaterAid India is applying district wide approach towards universal access to sanitation. For the past few years, WaterAid India has been able to establish credibility in the state by providing meaningful contribution to WASH sector in the state which is recognized at different level. Strong field presence and outreach make the organization unique in different ways. We have been able to demonstrate some of the models that are widely acknowledged by the Government. . It has accumulated a wealth of experience, lessons from which can be applied at the District level. Although the goal of achieving the status of clean India by 2019 set by the government seems a bit difficult task, efforts are being made by the organisation to demonstrate how district wide approach can speed up the process in the field. Learnings from this approach comprises of six components which are discussed below:

### **Shifting focus from mere infrastructure to change in behaviour**

One of the main reasons for slippage in sanitation has been the gap in effective IEC/ BCC strategies adopted by the government at the grassroots. Behaviour Change is the most significant factor in bringing about sustainable change in acceptance of improved water and sanitation practices by communities. In both urban and rural areas, WaterAid actively promotes the good hygiene practices and proper use and handling of water. Demand creation for access and use of safe and sustainable sanitation is done through community driven participatory approaches like CLTS using the BCC tools. The community mobilisation process is an intensive procedure which forms a full circle starting from rapport building, triggering exercises, creation and strengthening of local institutions and follow ups. This intensive process helps in formation of community monitoring systems which help in achieving the desired behaviour change of the community. The village institutions which play a major role in bringing about behaviour change are VWSCs, vigilant committee of the village volunteers and Self Help Groups. It is quite evident that community has a major role to play in order to achieve the sanitation at scale and ensure the sustainability. The organization has been successful in most of the places in accelerating the sanitation coverage by putting community at the centre. Collective decisions through community based approach such as CLTS has helped immensely to improve the sanitation coverage at scale and as a result several villages have achieved the status of Open Defecation Free(ODF). It is encouraging to note that with the help of this approach communities built their toilets on their own without waiting for the government's incentives.

In both the states, intensive community mobilisation process is being carried out through a cadre of village volunteers. A group of volunteers from the village are identified who are then given proper orientation on the basics of safe practices of water and sanitation. A village immersion plan is chalked out with the help of the volunteers which comprises of wall writings, door to door campaign, ratri chaupals (evening community meetings), school led campaigns, kala jattha (street play), screening of films. This helps in giving the process of change the momentum of a campaign. In Rajnandgaon district of Chhattisgarh, along with village volunteers the campaign is carried out through a people's network – Janshakti. The network actively engages in demanding the rights of community. In the same district, IEC activities with focus on people with disability are being undertaken. One of the examples of supporting the district on this component can be found in Morena district of Madhya Pradesh. Here the organisation worked with the district administration in developing IEC strategy for the district. Similarly, In Datia district support was provided to the district administration in developing the comprehensive IEC plan and execution of the same. These interventions helped in speedy sanitation coverage across several blocks in the district.

It can be seen that BCC strategy adopted by us has been working quite well in most of the places. Different options of behaviour change communications such as inter personal communication, door to door visit, educating children through fun and games and meeting in small group in evening have been helpful in mobilising the community. Messages were used in considering the local context as a part of effective communication strategy. These activities have helped us in connecting with community quite well. The focus of BCC, IEC is not only limited to the information but how information is analyzed by the community and the actions taken by the community on the basis of analysis. In other words, information is converted into knowledge which help them to take the action. Also, it is realized to link sanitation with other sectors if sanitation does not come as first priority of the community. For example, it can be linked with health issues, women issues to sensitise the community to adopt the safe sanitation practices. Hence, it is important to find out the positive triggers to motivate the community. In most of the places, the organization has been successful in identifying the positive triggers and linking sanitation with other sectors which helped significantly. Also, communication strategy was developed accordingly by limiting the messages to one or two key messages.

### **Influencing policies and implementing strategies**

Advocacy and information sharing with key stakeholders play an important role in policy development. Along with community level project delivery, WaterAid programmes also have advocacy/ policy dialog component which involve engaging with a wide range of stakeholders such as civil society organisations, government bodies, legislatures and parliamentarians. In Chhattisgarh, at the state level a WASH forum has been formed by NGOs to exchange ideas, introducing innovative approaches and for advocacy with policy makers. For rolling out CLTS in the state, a task force comprising of government functionaries and NGOs has also been formed. The task force is involved actively in the training of Swachta Doots in 7 districts of the State. In Sheopur district of Madhya Pradesh, WaterAid and partners advocated for introducing dedicated classes for all school children around WASH. The EcoSan toilet pilot undertaken in Korba district of Chhattisgarh is developing a thinking around alternative models for sustainable sanitation in the other parts of the state as well. For this a short documentary has been shared with the government officials and discussions are being held. WaterAid is also providing technical support to the state to roll out implementation plan of SLWM. In Madhya Pradesh, the organisation is advocating for specific policy in order to address the issues around school sanitation. Under this, we developed a document based on the field experiences and analysis of the secondary literature which talks about the minimum quality standard required for sustainable WASH services in schools. This is a paradigm shift for the school sanitation where we are trying to influence policy makers to move away from mere infrastructure creation to look at school sanitation holistically where we talk about all components of sanitation including toilets, MHM management, solid and liquid waste management and the minimum quality standards required to ensure sustainability of the same.

### **Capacity building of service providers and natural leaders**

Capacity building of the service providers is another area which is central to the success of any programme. It is observed that most of the capacity building programmes organized by the government are aimed at enhancing the capacity of actors who work primarily at district or state level. There are some programmes for outreach workers like Swachhata Doots/natural leaders but its effectiveness remains an issue. The little investment in capacity building of this cadre is so diluted in content that there is hardly any motivation for the swachadoots to pursue the objectives of the sanitation scheme. Also, content of these programmes seems good on paper but its application is not up to the mark. Recognizing this gap, the organization sees capacity building as key component towards sector strengthening. Efforts are being made towards enhancing the capacity of various stakeholders working at different levels. Technical support is being provided in designing and execution of the programme. Different training materials have been developed by the organization in order to ensure the quality of these programmes. A large scale training programmes aimed at enhancing the capacity of supply side as well as demand side actors have been undertaken in all the districts. Outreach workers of different departments are facilitated so that they can take the WASH related issues forward. In addition, representatives of local government are empowered to ensure the WASH facilities in their respective areas. The focus is on changing the mindset of people by applying the CLTS approach. In addition, the committees, institutions working at different level are being strengthened for ensuring better WASH services. In addition, capacity building programmes for natural leaders were organised on CLTS. It is felt that the role of natural leaders becomes critical in making this kind of programme successful. Proper identification of these leaders and building their capacities are essential in accelerating the sanitation coverage. It is encouraging to see that in most of the villages, these natural leaders played an instrumental role in mobilising and educating the community around sanitation issues and in achieving the ODF status.

### **Governance and institutional strengthening**

Lack of WASH services is also due to the weak governance systems that exist around it. In the rural context in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, the lowest tier of government – the panchayati raj systems are involved merely as a sub-contractor in the government programmes. In the urban set up, governance challenges are worse. Schemes are practically implemented by the executive wing of the municipalities with decision making vesting with the Mayor in Council or the President in council alone. The other elected representatives and the community is not at all involved. This leads to a very high level of apathy towards the schemes and there is hardly any ownership of the communities. The committees constituted under the schemes. Out interventions around grassroots governance focuses on three key building blocks – a) building capacities of elected representatives on collective decision making, b) on using various accountability tools

to ensure that the government is held accountable and c) increase participation of community through different forums like Gram Sabhas (village assembly) or mohalla samities (neighbourhood groups). In Sheopur and Umaria in Madhya Pradesh and in Rajnandgaon in Chhattisgarh, these interventions have shown considerable increase in access of WASH rights among community members.

Based on the experience, it can be said that the involvement and ownership of the Gram Sabha (village assembly) and community level committees is crucial for making the large scale programme successful. A significant growth in demand for sanitation can be seen by the community through active gram sabha. Hence, it is important to focus on empowerment of village assembly and committees which provides a platform for community to participate actively and discuss their issues. In other words, the issue of sanitation needs to be seen from the governance point of view as well otherwise it would be difficult to achieve the desired outcome.

### **Rights based approach for WASH**

It is well-known that a large number of people not having access to safe drinking water and sanitation is not due to lack of resources but as result of inequitable power relations that exist in the society. A large proportion of this population comprises of poor and marginalized whose voice are not heard usually. Rights based approach helps us to analyse the issues around inequitable power relations which prevent millions of people from accessing the safe drinking water and sanitation. This approach works towards empowering the most vulnerable and excludes individuals and communities so that they can play proactive role in the process of development rather than seen as passive recipient. This approach is important at each stage of development processes such as situation analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The organization is applying this approach in all the programmes in order to empower the communities and individuals so that they can demand their rights to water and sanitation. Work in this area includes the capacity enhancement of the community which enable them to analyse their situation and understand the various reasons of deprivation particularly around water and sanitation. It is ensured that the most excluded and deprived sections of the society get priority in all the interventions. They are facilitated in such a way so that they can participate in the planning and implementation of the programme aimed at improving the sanitation status. In addition, they closely monitor the progress and question the state machinery if discrepancy is found. It also helps them to hold the duty bearers accountable. In Rajnandgaon district of Chhattisgarh, a people's network, 'Janshakti' has endorsed the Right to Sanitation (RtS) campaign for demanding WASH services as rights of the community from the government. Similarly, in Sheopur and Umaria districts of Madhya Pradesh, a human rights based approach is being applied by the organisation in order to empower the community and increase the accountability of duty bearers.

This approach has helped in realising the rights of marginalised and excluded. Situation analysis helped excluded communities to understand the different forms of deprivation they are facing and why it is important to focus on the sanitation rights. This also helped in bringing the sense of ownership among them. Use of different accountability tools such as public hearing, Right to information has helped community in holding the duty bearers accountable thereby increasing access to the sanitation scheme.

### **Demonstration and innovation**

Demonstration and innovation is another component which has been given due attention as a part of continuous learning. In Chhattisgarh piloting of EcoSan toilet was carried out successfully in Korba district. The piloting involved construction of EcoSan toilets and using the manure in agriculture and horticulture. The successful piloting at Korba helped in convincing communities in other areas in adopting EcoSan toilets in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Innovation helps in moulding to the local conditions which help in easier acceptance by the community. Some of the successful innovations carried out were the structure of EcoSan toilets in Korba which helped in reducing the cost of construction significantly; and due to which it can be constructed with the incentive of the Swachh Bharat Mission. Other pilots which were successful and can be mentioned are involvement of men in MHM program (in Korba), demonstration of CLTS and combined Training of Trainers of Government Service Providers and NGOs on CLTS, piloting intervention on Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) in Raipur, intervention on inclusive WASH by demonstrating the disabled friendly toilets in Rajnandgaon. Conclusions.

The huge challenge that India faces as far as sanitation is concerned cannot be addressed at the slow pace of coverage that the country had been following till now. Along with pace, it is essential to go on a saturation mode at the village, panchayat, block and district level. Since district is the critical decision

making body as far as implementation of the scheme is concerned, it is important to look at district as a unit of intervention and district wide approach on a saturation mode to meet the sanitation targets.

Our experience so far has been quite encouraging as it looks at a comprehensive approach for universal access. This is often overlooked by the government functionaries in the programme who are too engrossed in meeting the targets – on toilet construction alone in the sanitation programme. This approach gives options to look beyond mere numbers and also on the aspects like equity, inclusion, behaviour change etc.

The scale of the sanitation challenge in the country itself requires investments in developing a huge cadre of village level functionaries. The sanitation scheme – Swachh Bharat Mission – has provisions for developing swachhata doots to promote sanitation at the village level. The investment in high quality capacity building of this cadre will be most critical for meeting the objectives of the mission.

Large scale programmes often overlook principles of equity and inclusion. The engagement of civil society on building this component can strengthen the sanitation programme that the country is implementing. The rights based work piloted in some of the districts intervened by WaterAid has helped in making the interventions sustainable.

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### **Note/s**

<sup>i</sup> A district is the nationally-recognised unit of administration, revenue and development.

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