Improving water and sanitation access for Dalits in Andhra Pradesh

Improving accountability to ensure equitable and sustainable WASH services for the poor and marginalised

Lessons from the governance and transparency programme

Women Panchayat representatives raising water and sanitation issues at a meeting with local government
Introduction

The governance and transparency programme

2008 saw the launch of a five-year governance and transparency programme, funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) and coordinated by FAN Global and WaterAid. The programme recognised that effective, well governed states are better at protecting people’s rights and providing services and aimed to improve the accountability and responsiveness of duty bearers to ensure equitable and sustainable WASH services for the poorest and most marginalised communities in the global South.

With an understanding of governance that extends beyond the state alone, the programme fostered engagement between governments, civil society organizations and service providers. It was implemented by more than 30 local civil society organizations (CSOs) in Africa, South Asia and Latin America.

In South Asia, the programme was implemented by Freshwater Action Network South Asia and a number of its members in India and Bangladesh. This document outlines some of the work undertaken in Andhra Pradesh where FANSA’s India chapter worked with the Centre for Rural Studies and Development (CRSD), an NGO which has been working with Dalit and minority tribal populations for over 20 years.
CRSD worked in Anantapur, one of the most undeveloped districts, India’s most severely drought-affected area after Rajasthan. Predominantly rural, 73% of the area’s population lives in villages. Despite substantial investments in the water and sanitation sector, the government is still facing the challenge of low coverage and poor water and sanitation services quality, especially in the rural areas.

Before the governance and transparency programme started, communities in Andhra Pradesh were unaware of their rights and entitlements. Service delivery departments were unresponsive and drinking water systems were defunct for long periods of time. This caused hardship to rural communities, particularly affecting Dalit communities, women and children who would be forced to spend several hours collecting water a day.

**CRSD’s approach**

The programme supported CRSD’s work with PMC, an alliance of Dalit and tribal-focused NGOs, to improve WASH governance. From its experience of working with poor and marginalised communities, CRSD was aware that their number one priority was earning a living. For this reason, CRSD combined advocacy on WASH governance issues with work on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme to streamline the rights to water and sanitation within the scheme and increase access to services among the rural poor.

Dalit communities face particular marginalization when it comes to access to water and sanitation. In India, more than 20% of Dalits do not have access to safe drinking water. 48.4% of Dalit villages are denied access to a water source and only 10% of Dalit households have access to sanitation as compared to 27% for non Dalit households. Dalit women stand in separate queues near the bore well to fetch water until the non Dalits finish fetching water.
Training and capacity building

In order to build a broad picture of their needs, CRSD assessed the capacity building needs of network members and staff in relation to advocacy skills, rights-based approaches, information gathering and dissemination and knowledge development. This understanding was built upon and developed through subsequent meetings and workshops.

The regular trainings that CRSD carried out were hosted by local government offices. Through regular interactions and capacity building, communities learnt that access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a human right and became aware of the government’s and service provider’s responsibilities. They learnt about the government’s grievance mechanism and arranged interface workshops at sub-district and district level to raise their issues in public to pressurise the government to deliver.

The strategy of organising meetings and trainings within government premises helped communities to develop confidence and improve interactions with government officials which slowly led to improved service delivery and increased transparency.

For the first time, Dalits, tribal communities and other marginalised communities felt that they were able to present their points of view on WASH and other issues. Over time, trust was built between two CSO networks (PMC and the Andhra Pradesh NGO Alliance (APNA)) and the state government. As the monthly meetings progressed, these views slowly began to influence the decisions made by the district officials.

CRSD and its partners also used government initiatives such as the ‘Praja Patham’ which aims to encourage local government responsiveness through regular visits to villages by local government to hear community concerns, to raise awareness amongst the poorest of the poor, specifically on two issues:

- Proper enforcement of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The Act guarantees 100 days of waged employment to every rural citizen but is frequently badly managed with community members working under the scheme having to wait long periods before they are paid.
- Ensuring that safe drinking water facilities are provided for community members at worksites under government-funded livelihood programmes.
The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

Launched in 2008, the Indian Government’s Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act guarantees a minimum of 100 days employment a year in rural infrastructure projects for rural unskilled labourers.

Under the Act, within 15 days of a valid application, the government must provide work or an unemployment allowance at a minimum wage of rupees 60 per day. However, for illiterate labourers, accessing the scheme without external support is difficult.

CRSD was one of the collective voices which called on department of rural development to include latrine building within the employment scheme and, in 2010, the government announced an amendment to the employment guarantee act stated that seven of the 100 work days could be given to sanitary development such as digging a latrine pit.

The wage provided by the employment scheme combined with the new possibility of applying the labour to building latrines, meant the landless labourers were able to save enough money to pay the contribution demanded by the government to complement its grant for building a toilet.

Government interface meetings

To understand livelihood and WASH issues from a Dalit perspective, CRSD and PMC conducted a social audit of how the government’s livelihood programme was actually being implemented. The findings were presented to members and to the government.

As a result of an initial interface meeting, with the government, all five mandal offices started to hold monthly meetings with community members under the leadership of the Centre for Rural Studies and Development. Moreover, monthly meetings were held at the sub-district, district and state level. Through this participatory approach and constructive dialogue, a space was created for authorities, institutions and community members to sit together to share their experiences.

The process supported communities to learn about government schemes and allow them to submit their applications directly to the officials concerned. The meetings were extremely beneficial because they ensured regular follow ups on government service delivery commitments.
A sub-district meeting
In B Yaleru village, 102 Dalit families were suffering from drinking water scarcity for several years. Even though there was an overhead tank in the main village built by RWS, there was no pipeline to the community.

CRSD helped the community to raise awareness about the issue by forming water and sanitation committee meetings including government officials. At every review meeting with the officials, the committee consistently demanded that a pipeline be laid from the overhead tank to the community.

A sub-district meeting was organised with communities at the premises of the Mandal Parishat Development Office, Atmakuru. By inviting a range of cross departmental officers at sub-district level, decisions could be taken in consultation with other departments at the meeting itself. Nearly 135 water and sanitation committee members consisting of self help group members and Srama Shakthi Sanghas (SSS) from 15 Grama Panchayats also participated in the meeting.

Government representatives included the Mandal Parishat Development Officer (MPDO), the Assistant Programme Officer, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) Officer, a Medical Officer, a Primary Health Center (PHC) Officer, the Assistant Engineer, a Work Inspector from the Rural Water Supply Scheme (RWSS), Grama Sarpanches (Village Headmen) from Pampanuru and from Vaddipalli and the Special Nodal Officer.

The community decided the issues that formed the meeting’s agenda. Throughout the energetic three hour deliberation, there were many exchanges of information from both sides as well as suggestions on how to provide Dalit communities with safe drinking water. This kind of meeting helped the Dalit community to gain confidence and led the leaders in B Yaleru village to represent their demand for equal access to safe piped drinking water to their housing colony at one end of the village.

Ultimately, the officials yielded and sanctioned Rs 200,000 for a pipeline which has now been installed.
Programme achievements

• Marginalised Dalit communities and school children in 165 villages accessed improved water and sanitation facilities.

• The government approved an allocation of two rupees per person per day for drinking water, benefiting nearly 800,000 community members.

• For the first time, the Education Department allowed schools to use their maintenance funds for maintaining toilets.

• Substantial investments have been made using labourers employed by the employment guarantee scheme to renovate water recharging structures which has led to increased water tables in most of the areas covered.

• In May 2012, the government agreed to include latrine building within the employment scheme. In this approach, the government pays rural labourers to build the latrines as part of the existing employment scheme. CRSD provides the training and covers the material costs.

• In April 2012, the Indian Government raised the subsidy for a toilet to Rs.9,100/- from Rs.3,750 in Andhra Pradesh. Rs.4,500 is borne by the employment guarantee scheme budget for the labour needed to construct the toilet.

• As a result of the collaborative approach, the government institutionalised the dialogue by forming a government organisation – the Andhra Pradesh Alliance of NGOs (APNA) which is monitoring the implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Scheme in Andhra Pradesh. Both the Department of Rural Development (responsible for WASH) and the Department of Primary Education are involved in the committee.

• The Department for Rural Development has passed government orders giving space for NGO network members to participate in the monthly state-level interface workshop with the Principle Secretary of Rural Development that reviews the employment guarantee scheme and at district-level with the Project Director of the District Water Management Department. Furthermore, the government has now taken on the role of facilitator and funder of the meetings.

• Facilitated by civil society organisations, the work has strengthened interactions at village, sub-district and district level and between government officials and rural labourers.
The Governance and Transparency Fund was a joint WaterAid and FAN Global-supported programme funded by the UK’s department for international development.

Centre for Rural Studies and Development (CRSD) was started as a small voluntary organisation in 1991 to work in one of the most backward area of Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh which is identified as severe drought-affected area after Rajasthan. The district is also known for feudalistic and faction leaders who control every aspect of life.

CRSD is a member of regional civil society network FAN South Asia, a South Asian civil society network uniting over 450 civil society members in five South Asian countries to influence decision making on water and sanitation. FANSA is a regional member of the global network FAN Global.