

Improving WASH through social inclusion in Odisha

*Improving accountability
to ensure equitable
and sustainable WASH
services for the
poor and marginalised*
**Lessons from the governance and
transparency programme**



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 partners 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 the work undertaken in Odisha, where FANSA's India chapter worked with Gram Vikas, a local civil society organisation advocating for better WASH services to implement programme activities.

Gram Vikas' works to improve living conditions for the poor, helping communities to climb out of poverty and develop the confidence to take charge of their own development.

The governance and transparency programme in Odisha

Odisha, located in the eastern part of the country, is often labelled India's poorest state – 60% of its 37 million population, 86% of whom live in rural areas, lives below the poverty line. According to studies conducted in the early 1990s, over 80% of the cases of morbidity and mortality in rural Odisha could be traced to poor quality of drinking water, which was largely a consequence of poor sanitation, especially inadequate disposal of human waste.

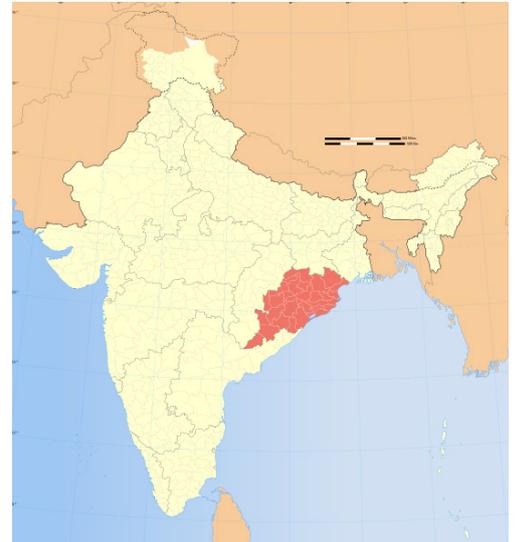
Sadly, the last two decades have not brought about any significant change – according to a study carried out in 2004, out of 4,399 households in 49 villages across nine districts of Orissa, less than 1% had access to safe and protected water supply.

Gram Vikas' approach

Gram Vikas' founders came to the state in the early 1970's as student volunteers to serve victims of a devastating cyclone. Motivated by their extensive activism they formed Gram Vikas, which currently serves more than 389,333 of Odisha's population.

During its long-term involvement with the poor, Gram Vikas has learned that social exclusion of Dalits (considered 'untouchables' in the Indian caste system), Adivasis (Indian indigenous tribes), lower castes, widows and women in general poses the greatest challenge in India's rural society and that in order to achieve a better quality of life in remote areas, a process where communities go through an experiential learning of social inclusion is essential.

With this in mind, Gram Vikas developed a scheme called MANTRA, the Movement and Action Network for Transformation in Rural Areas, which promotes social inclusion and unites communities through capacity building and provision of water and sanitation facilities around WASH issues.



FANSA worked with Gram Vikas to implement the governance and transparency programme in Odisha, often considered India's poorest state.

Picture credit: CC-by-sa PlaneMad / Wikimedia

The project

MANTRA: provision of WASH facilities

For Gram Vikas to work with a village on a MANTRA initiative, 100% of the families must agree to participate in the programme to ensure that the benefits are shared equally among all, irrespective of sex, caste, creed or economic status.

The next step is for the village to come together to form a general body, which then elects an executive committee, with an equal number of male and female representatives. Each committee is registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860, which enables villages to leverage development resources in a more effective manner.

At the start of the programme, each family is expected to contribute an average of 1,000 rupees towards a village 'corpus fund' and while the rich subsidise the poor, even the poorest widow has to contribute 100 rupees. This 'corpus fund', placed in a bank deposit, earns interest and is used to support 'new families' that might settle in a project village in the future, ensuring 100% coverage at all times.

Apart from the funds raised by the communities, resources for WASH infrastructure are provided through a combination of government subsidy (under the Swajaldhara Rural Drinking Water Supply Scheme) and funds provided by

Gram Vikas. Gram Vikas provides an average subsidy of 3,000 rupees per family (and an enhanced assistance of 3,500 rupees to Dalits and Adivasies and in some very remote areas). Communities are also encouraged to tap discretionary funds available from local governments.

The funds provided by families, government bodies and Gram Vikas meet the cost of all the hardware including cement, steel, toilet pan, doors etc which are then used to supply all the families supported by MANTRA with three taps - in the toilet, bathroom and kitchen.

MANTRA: promoting social inclusion and building capacity

Alongside the provision of WASH infrastructure, capacity building and fighting social exclusion form a key pillar of Gram Vikas' MANTRA scheme. Gram Vikas spends between three to five years building capacity of communities, especially women and the marginalised, so that they can participate in public life on a level equal to the rest of their communities. The poorest woman, widow or Dalit feels that they have a voice that will be heard and that matters, often for the first time in their lives.

Because the implementation of MANTRA is dependent upon participation of 100% of families in each village, it ensures that the programme's benefits are shared by all, regardless of sex,

caste, creed or socio-economic status; even if just one family backs out, the programme is not commenced.

As well as promoting social inclusion, MANTRA also aims to build the capacity of the poorest by training them on how to deal with conflict and act as pressure group against vested interests within their village and beyond. They also learn how to maintain public accounts and how to organise village meetings and elections. Communities also learn to question and hold the village committee to account, thus exerting a social pressure on the governance mechanisms that are established.

In order to promote social inclusion, MANTRA also provides skills training needed for the construction of WASH infrastructure. This builds the confidence of landless unskilled labourers who are seldom included in livelihood improvement enterprises. Both men and women are trained in masonry before they construct toilets, bathing rooms and overhead water tanks under the supervision of master masons and an engineer. These newly trained masons are then assured work for at least one year.

In addition, there is a special effort to involve and empower women, both socially and economically. Self help groups, with an average of 10-15 members per group, are formed in project villages. Self help groups engage in a variety



of activities, aiming to strengthen women's ability to resolve their problems and manage their finances. For example, self-help groups might serve as an entry point for improving women's livelihoods by linking them to banks and government schemes.

As educating women is often the equivalent of educating an entire family, Gram Vikas staff raise awareness within these self help groups on the importance of personal hygiene. Small but instructive messages about using soap to clean the hands, bathing regularly and wearing clean clothes are promoted at the self-help group meetings.

After Gram Vikas leaves, the families and communities that were involved in MANTRA have become 'critical masses' with the power to influence government policies and negotiate market relations - truly functional 'village republics' as envisaged by the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

Programme achievements

Gram Vikas' experience shows how something as basic as providing WASH infrastructure can generate sustainable change, not only by reducing disease and morbidity, but by uniting divergent strands within communities. By changing existing power structures and enabling the marginalised to become active members of their communities, MANTRA has triggered new strands of development and achieves substantial improvements in the quality of people's lives.

The significance of MANTRA's impact is striking - as of March 2012, 366,999 people across 1,129 villages in Odisha have been reached. MANTRA has also been implemented by other partners in the governance and transparency programme in India, reaching 100 families across two villages in Madhya Pradesh, 84 families in Jharkhand and 72 families across three villages in Andhra Pradesh.

Improvements to WASH

- 100% coverage in WASH infrastructure was achieved in communities that were targeted MANTRA.
- The programme has had a positive impact on the quality of life, reducing the incidence of water-borne diseases. Studies have shown an 85% reduction in water borne diseases, such as skin conditions and diarrhoea in targeted villages.
- Sanitation infrastructure provided

as part of the scheme not only contributes to improvements in the quality of people lives, but also entire communities. Owing to the importance given to personal hygiene, people in targeted communities are more aware of the importance of keeping their village clean.

Improvements to accountability and capacity

- Communities where MANTRA has been implemented demonstrate improved levels accountability and transparency.
- MANTRA enabled communities to mobilise their own resources, helping them to break away from the inertia caused by a long history of marginalisation and deprivation.
- Several villages have leveraged the community to improve or lobby for other common services and resources in the village, including village schools, health centres, common ponds, wastelands.

"Our village is better than the town. We have 24/7 piped water supply to all families, without exception. Every family has their own toilet and bathing room. When we seek marriage alliances, our daughters ask us, 'would there be similar facilities there?'"
Lalita Malik,
Ganjam district





Centre for Rural Studies and Development (CRSD) works to improve living conditions for the poor, helping communities to climb out of poverty and develop the confidence to take charge of their own development.



Freshwater Action Network
South Asia

Gram Vikas 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. .



Freshwater Action Network



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