
Empowering rural communities to demand WASH services in Jharkhand

*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 Jharkhand, where FANSA's India chapter worked with Shibpur Association for Technological, Humanitarian and Environmental Endeavours (SATHEE), a local civil society organisation advocating for better WASH services to implement activities in Jharkhand, India.

Since it was established in 2007, SATHEE has been working in a number of regions in Jharkhand to enable people to gain sustainable and sufficient access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

“People in these areas are extremely poor and marginalised, but we are trying to establish the right to water to amplify the voices of poor people at district and state levels.”

Dr Neeraj Mishra, SATHEE

The governance and transparency programme in Jharkhand

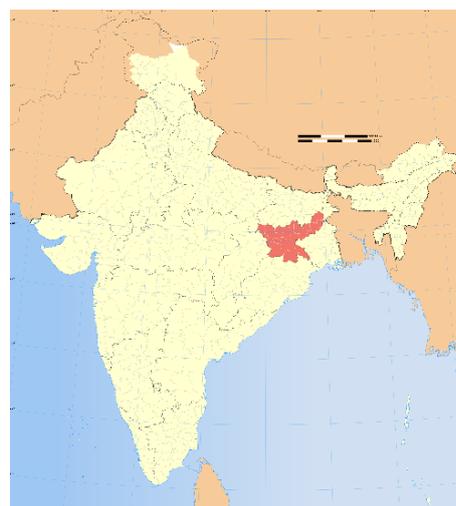
Despite being very rich in natural resources and home to some of the country's most industrialised cities, Jharkhand is one of India's lowest income states. This lack of resources means that poor sanitation provision and a lack of awareness about hygiene practices remain a common problem, particularly in rural areas.

As well as widespread poverty, Jharkhand has high levels of political instability. Since the state's formation in 2000, it has suffered from rampant corruption and frequent changes within local government, with eight different administrations during the state's short history.

SATHEE's approach

SATHEE's activities focused on Jharkhand's Santhal areas, India's culturally vibrant, indigenous tribal groups, most of whom live in the least developed parts of the state. The Santhal areas were selected due to their high rates of poverty, their lack of WASH services and because no other NGOs were active there.

SATHEE focused on empowering these communities, organising and training people so that their local communities can independently hold service providers to account and continue to do so after the programme ends. Recognising that change requires empowered authorities as well as communities, SATHEE also supported officials to engage with the public.



Under the governance and transparency programme, SATHEE focused on the Santhal tribal communities, who live in the least developed parts of the state.

Picture credit: CC-by-saPlaneMad /Wikimedia

The project

Village WASH champions

SATHEE started its work by raising awareness of water and sanitation issues in communities. Then, together with the village councils, SATHEE supported the communities to appoint community-based volunteers to spearhead the community's WASH advocacy activities. These volunteers, called cadres, are trained by SATHEE to identify the WASH issues in their villages and report them to SATHEE and the government.

SATHEE empowered them to transform local power structures and create their own platforms for problem-solving and planning. It also helped the community to develop technical and influencing skills and supported them to understand how to integrate marginalised people into the heart of WASH programmes.

Once trained, the cadres worked to exert pressure on local governments to deliver inclusive services. A strong emphasis was put on transparency and the cadres were responsible for keeping the community up-to-date on their work.

Access centres

In addition to forming and training the cadres, SATHEE has also set up twelve access centres. The access centres turned out to be a key resource. Once established, the centres acted as information centres where local communities and government workers could

go for advice, training or to submit or follow up government applications (on requests for WASH infrastructure or repairs for example). The centres were also used as venues for interface meetings between government officials and community representatives.

Before setting up an access centre, SATHEE would meet with local government officers to inform them of its plans and build support for their operations. Making local governments aware of these activities is widely accepted as best practice but in a state like Jharkhand, where political tensions are high, gaining governmental support is considered absolutely essential.

In the short term, access centres were operated by community volunteers and sometimes the cadres together with SATHEE staff but when SATHEE support comes to an end, the centres will be run independently by community volunteers and hosted by the local Gram Panchayath offices.

Influencing state policy

Recognising that sustainable changes in governance and transparency cannot happen through community-level engagement alone, SATHEE supported government officials to understand how they can fulfil their obligations, by respecting the rights to water and sanitation and cooperating with communities

"We stand back when the communities go to the government. We believe they have the power to make change. There is a big difference between a NGO alliance and the alliance of the marginalised!"
Dr Neeraj Mishra, SATHEE

without the need for NGO involvement.

SATHEE was nominated as a working committee member in Jharkhand's Water and Sanitation Mission, which strengthened its access to policymakers and implementing agencies.

Thanks to its engagement with local officials, SATHEE was able to influence state-level WASH policies. Jharkhand's government adopted reforms for devolution of powers, specifying that all settlements in the state would have a Village Water and Sanitation Committee and a Jal Sahayya (a female volunteer) in place to manage water and sanitation programmes. All government funds for WASH will now be routed through these village committees. SATHEE supported this process by strengthening the Village Water and Sanitation Committee training programme and ensuring that the Government transfers funds to these committees.

Exposing corruption in Amarpur

The Government of India's Department of Rural Water Supply has a database that shows what has been delivered to which region as part of its water and sanitation programme. According to the department's website, Amarpur Panchayat in Jharkhand had 636 toilets.

However, SATHEE and local villagers could identify only



10-12 toilets, none of which were functional. The Amarpur community was shocked by the huge difference between the Government's figures and the reality. It seemed clear that this was an example of a much wider problem – widespread corruption in the district.

The village council and the community complained at district level and requested that the missing toilets be installed. Shortly afterwards, district officials visited the village and tried, unsuccessfully, to bribe the community leaders to keep quiet. The village council then filed a right to information application, but the answers given were vague and unsatisfactory. Again, a village-level official tried to bribe the person who filed the request.

The villagers then decided to call a village meeting but, once again, the community and SATHEE staff found themselves under threat from outsiders.

To try to resolve the situation, a

group of villagers visited the district-level Development Commissioner to initiate an official process to assess the 'real' situation. The community waited for the findings of this investigation before taking any further action but again they were not given a satisfactory explanation.

Recently, the village decided to file a Public Interest Litigation against the local government in the state's high court arguing that the government failed to respond to the community's right to information application.

Even though this issue remains unresolved, the wide range of advocacy tools that was used by the community and the extensive array of skills they displayed demonstrates a major improvement to the local power structure.

Budget advocacy in Kolbadda

In Kolbadda, SATHEE supported its village water and sanitation committee to mobilise government WASH programmes. They sent a demand to the local district administration to provide all the 672 families in the Gram Panchayath (a local self-government federation at village or small town level) with individual household latrines.

After three months, the local district water and sanitation department had not taken any action. With SATHEE's support, the

community organised a public hearing to expose the inaction and hold the government to account using the monitoring data evidence collected by the community. During the public hearing they learned that the Gram Panchayath was officially recorded as having 100% sanitation coverage and reported as such to the government. They immediately filed an application under the right to information Act to access the Government's sanitation coverage statistics, budget and expenditure.

At first the government officials sent two people to negotiate with the federation and try to silence it. But the Gram Panchayat stood firm and resolute. During the next 35 days, officials did not produce any information, but took steps to repair all the non-functioning hand pumps and constructed school sanitary blocks in a bid to pacify the community.

Another meeting was then called by the Gram Panchayath to review the situation in which they decided to submit another right to information application. In response, the local administration presented the federation with a written apology and finally shared details of the budget. They committed to constructing the remaining latrines within two months as well as constructing rubbish pits and soak pits to help increase groundwater levels.

Programme achievements

SATHEE worked with 57 villages, supporting 60,710 people in Jharkhand.

Construction of 647 toilets.

In SATHEE project areas, 70% of the original allocation of hand pump maintenance budget was re-allocated to tribal areas, to ensure resources prioritised those most in need.

Access Centres were set up in 30% of the project districts.

Access Centres have filed more than 300 applications for hand pump repairs or for new hand pump installation. More than 50 of these applications have already been resolved.

Many marginalised communities that previously suffered from a feeling of powerlessness now feel empowered to engage with the government and challenge the status quo.

SATHEE was nominated as a working committee member in Jharkhand's Water and Sanitation Mission, strengthening its access to policymakers and implementing agencies.



SATHEE enables people to attain sustainable access to sufficient safe drinking water and sanitation.



Freshwater Action Network
South Asia

SATHEE is a member of 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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