

## **Transparency, accountability and participation in the WASH sector in Andhra Pradesh, India**

### **Key messages:**

Research by WASHCost (India) in rural villages in Andhra Pradesh, India, has highlighted low levels of transparency, accountability and participation in crucial areas of decision making despite efforts by the State government to promote participatory processes.

Most people out of a sample of 107 villages in Andhra Pradesh, feel they have little to say in how water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services are planned and implemented, while democratic structures to oversee good management of WASH services are failing to have an impact.

Village water and sanitation committees (VWSCs) are supposed to be at the heart of village efforts to improve services – but the research in Andhra Pradesh shows that they either do not exist or are invisible to those they are supposed to be serving.

When key groups of people were questioned in 107 villages, only one group in 20 knew what the village water and sanitation committees were doing. These groups<sup>1</sup> include village leadership (Gram Panchayat), Self-Help Groups of women, Youth Groups and focus groups within Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribe communities (SC/ST). More than 90% of these groups believed that there was no village water and sanitation committee in existence.

More than 420 groups across the villages gave their opinions and views on issues ranging from tariffs and water user fee collection to disposal of solid and liquid waste. On the whole, 40% of the groups said that no participation had taken place at all.

The survey also spotlighted how difficult women find it to raise their voices in village meetings. Three quarters of the village groups agreed that women are not listened to, and in some villages the women found that the atmosphere in meetings is hostile and even threatening. This is particularly significant because the issues that women most want to raise in village meetings concern water, sanitation and hygiene.

### **Accountability, participation and transparency of different institutions in WASH**

Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Department (RWSS) of Andhra Pradesh has several initiatives to promote participatory processes in support of the guidelines of the National Rural Drinking Water

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<sup>1</sup> Gram Panchayats are the leading governance bodies at village level which receive funds from Government for operation and maintenance of WASH facilities and manage service delivery. Self-Help Groups are women's groups set up to obtain loans for income-generating activities. Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribe communities are the lower caste and usually marginalized communities. The youth groups were ad hoc focus groups made up of boys and men aged 18-25.

Programme and the Total Sanitation Campaign both of which strongly support participatory processes. However, several assessments have pointed to gaps in implementing these initiatives.

Village water and sanitation committees are expected to take care of planning, coverage, maintenance and sustainable delivery of WASH services in rural areas. State Governments empower local institutions to assess WASH services from the community's point of view on issues such as access and usage, quantity, quality and reliability, responsiveness of service providers and user satisfaction.

The Gram Sabha is a formal platform to voice opinion and suggestions which contribute towards decision making vital to participation, accountability and transparency. However, six out of ten groups thought that decisions about WASH were taken elsewhere while a third believed that they were formally taken in the meetings, but were then ignored by officials. There are only nine villages of the 107 where all the groups felt that decisions were taken in the Gram Sabha and fully acted on afterwards.

### **The research methodology**

WASHCost carried out this survey on transparency, accountability and participation in the WASH sector in 107 villages across the state, of which 23 have been awarded the NGP (Nirmal Gram Puraskar) prize for being open-defecation free and having good general levels of village sanitation.

### **Box No 1 Meaning of Accountability, Transparency and Participation**

The term accountability within this report means, various actors/ institutions (Government, Gram Panchayats, etc.) have agreed upon certain roles, responsibilities, principles/ norms to be followed and tasks to be performed. Transparency here is the extent to which actors/institutions provide open and clear account of the tasks performed and decision taken. Participation deals with the level to which community members are involved in decision making while planning and implementing WASH schemes. The present report tries to find out the expected vs. actual process followed on the following themes.

#### **Transparency and Accountability:**

- Operation and maintenance of water points and hand-pumps
- Wastewater and solid waste
- Hygiene and sanitation
- Water supply and sanitation records
- Tariffs and water user fee collection
- Disclosure of information

#### **Participation:**

- Functioning of Village Water and Sanitation Committee
- Participation by women and Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe communities in community-level decision-making on water supply
- Functioning of the Gram Sabha on WASH issues
- Participation in feasibility and technical surveys
- Knowledge about extension of systems and integration with existing systems
- Effectiveness of training and information, education & communication (IEC)

Although NGP villages did better than non-NGP villages, a majority of even award-winning villages showed low levels of participation, accountability and transparency.

The WASHCost team conducted Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with different community groups in each village about their perceptions and awareness on the issues/indicators related to WASH service delivery, as mentioned in Box 1. For each indicator a checklist with scores ranging from 0-100 (0=worst, and 100= Ideal) was worked out after pretesting this several times. The FGDs were conducted separately for Gram Panchayat, Self Help Groups, Youth Groups and Scheduled Caste / Scheduled Tribe communities groups using the same checklist as base. The members of each group were then asked to arrive at a common score for the indicator after answering key questions and arriving at a consensus among themselves on the same questions. A description of the situation for every indicator was also taken from each group. The same checklist was used for all the groups, the main purpose of this being to explore the commonality and consistency in responses and knowledge bases among different target groups.

### **Further results**

At the village level, active Village water and sanitation committee should be a litmus test for effective governance. However, in all but two villages most groups were adamant that there was no functioning committee or that they were unaware of its work. In 15 of these villages, the Gram Panchayat said that there was actually a Village water and sanitation committee. The fact that its work was not seen or appreciated points to lack of transparency in these villages. However, in two villages all the groups agreed that there was a functioning committee.

Participation by women on community-level decision making on WASH issues scored particularly badly. Most groups in three quarters of the villages (87/107) thought women were not consulted and their views were not sought. Although Gram Sabhas (village meetings) are in theory open to all, women often do not come. Several groups said that that even if they did attend, the environment was not conducive to participation as these meetings are dominated by men. In one village the frustrated Self Help Groups had even carried out a demonstration protesting that women are not allowed to speak at community gatherings and even if they do speak up, no one listens. Another group said that officials ignored them. "They only listen to our problems and go off." This view is not always shared by everyone; in some villages other groups believe that women have equal decision-making power.

Results are a little better for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes than for women's groups, it is still the case that almost two thirds of the groups stated that SC/ST groups hardly participate in or contribute towards decisions that are taken at community gatherings. The SC/ST groups said that they did go to meetings and raise their concerns but that they have not been able to influence decision making. Some said that their villages never held Gram Sabha so there was no platform to raise their concerns. There are 17 villages (16%) where all the groups questioned agreed that the

SC/ST groups enjoy equal status and decision making powers with everyone else. “There are no caste barriers in this village,” was one such response.

Several key decisions with regards to water and drainage systems are taken after technical and feasibility surveys. A quarter of the village groups in the WASHCost survey considered that a feasibility survey was conducted with participation before planning new schemes, but most groups were unaware of the findings. The results of technical surveys for new schemes are poorly communicated; 80% of the groups were unaware of the findings and many groups unaware that a survey had taken place. Even three quarters of the Grama Panchayats agreed that they did not share the findings with other villagers.

Integration and extension of water systems within villages is required to ensure that all areas are covered and to avoid duplication of services. However, a majority of the groups said that there was no integration of services in their villages. In only five villages out of the 107 did all the groups agree that the quality and service delivery is almost same across all water points. Six out of ten groups felt that extensions to village water schemes were done in an ad hoc manner; some groups claimed that as a result the water taps had run dry. Grama Panchayats tended to think that everything was done properly and work was approved at a Gram Sabha but the other groups did not agree. There were only a few examples (7%) of good practice where integrations and extensions were discussed at Gram Sabha and works were carried out according to the agreed plan.

Training, capacity building and information is important if village citizens are to be empowered to play an effective role in decision making, but almost three quarters of the groups believed that no training had been carried out. Further, 16% stated that training had not contributed to their skills or capacity. Where training did take place it was often provided by an NGO on hygiene, or was about how to construct individual sanitary latrines.

Occurrences of diseases such as cholera in some villages have made people more conscious of the need for hygiene and sanitation. Many also mentioned that they gained such awareness by watching television programmes. However, this did not always lead to action and low participation was reported for dealing with solid waste and wastewater where more than 60% of the groups said that drains were missing or blocked.

The quality of water testing and information about the results is an important element which assists in deciding on alternative options. However, eight out of ten of the groups said that only the Grama Panchayat was made aware of these results. In one village the Grama Panchayat said that the results of testing had been made known at a Gram Sabha but none of the other groups were aware of this. There were similar wide gaps in the perception of what had taken place in other villages as well.

The survey also shows high levels of dissatisfaction with the maintenance of hand pumps and piped water systems in villages. Most felt that the local waterman – when one existed – was only trained to deal with minor repairs to the piped systems. As a result, major repairs in piped systems and all repairs to hand pumps have to be carried out by a technician from the Mandal level.

Information related to book keeping, accounts and tariffs gives an indication of the level of transparency within the village. From the survey, 88% of the groups knew what water tariff had been agreed but they said that the money was collected irregularly. Even in some well-organized villages, tariffs are only collected from 60-70% of the households. In the ten villages that scored high for this indicator, a majority of respondents know the total amount collected and also know that the surplus is used for operation and maintenance. Some even have differential tariffs depending on the economic status of the household and levy penalties for late payment.

However, almost nine out ten groups believe that the village record books for water and sanitation are not maintained properly or that only a few members of the Gram Panchayat are aware of the records. Similar proportions also believe that there is little effort to disclose information proactively to villagers. Only one or two villages disclosed all information to citizens and introduced effective feedback mechanisms.

The research for this study was carried out for WASHCost by WASSAN, Hyderabad during the WASHCost investigation into costs and service levels within 107 villages in the State of Andhra Pradesh, India.

**Drafted by: Safa Fanaian and MV Rama Chandrudu WASSAN**

**Supported by: Peter McIntyre, Dr Snehalatha and R Subramanyam Naidu**

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