

NIRMALBANDHU & JALABANDHU, WATER FOR PEOPLE (WFP)

• Background

The lack of trained hand pump mechanics at sub-block level has been one of the reasons for considerably longer down time of hand pumps in rural areas. To ensure continued water services, in 2008, WFP-India initiated a programme that invested in building a cadre of caretakers within the communities, to be responsible for regular operations and maintenance of drinking water systems. This initiative also serves as a business opportunity for the local youth who are engaged by the community as mechanics and caretakers for water systems. This cadre of trained youths under the WFP-India programme are called JB or “friends of water”.



Similarly, School Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (SWASH) programmes across the country have remained a huge challenge due to the lack of feasible model for operation and maintenance. WFP-India has addressed this issue in its program areas by building a cadre of trained youth who work as NBs or “friends of sanitation” and ensure that sanitation services in the schools remain functional. The NBs, the sanitation facility cleaners, have been trained on improved facility cleaning.

As per Joint Monitoring Programme 2015, it is estimated that 663 million people worldwide still use unimproved drinking water source, and 2.4 billion people globally use unimproved sanitation source. Further, 946 million (13% of world population) people still defecate in open. Decades of development initiatives by governments and non-profit organizations have not produced lasting solutions.

The issues of water and sanitation in India, the second most populous country in the world (over 1.2 billion people), are complex and a reflection of a diverse society. From urban to rural, coastal to inlands, mountains to deserts; India continues to struggle with managing and sustaining water at the source. The largest population lacking water and sanitation services reside in India. Though, India has made significant progress in providing access to drinking water and sanitation, over the decades, a lot needs to be done to ensure its sustenance.

Backed by 73rd Constitutional Amendment, district/block/panchayat and local-level institutions (like School Management Committee (SMC), Water User Committee (WUC) and Village Water & Sanitation Committee (VWSC)) have been created for the purpose. While in some places, these institutions appear to be effective, at many other places they are not. Thus, there exists a gap in services.

In India, as in many other countries, many boreholes and hand pumps installed to supply safe drinking water are broken and non-operational due to poor maintenance. O&M of SWASH facilities is another big challenge due to the lack of feasible model. WFP's 'JB & NB' programme is directed to solve this problem and create long-lasting solutions.

Nirmalbandhus (NB): a cadre of caretakers within communities for Operations & maintenance (O&M) of community WASH facilities.

- **Location, Date**

West Bengal & Bihar, year 2008 onwards

- **Areas**

Semi-urban and rural

- **Stage/Scale**

Pilot

- **Objective of the assignment**

To check feasibility of successful O&M of community water systems and school sanitation facilities, by creating a cadre of trained caretakers in the community, especially in rural areas.

- **What was done**

- The Project covers South 24 Parganas District in West Bengal and Sheohar District in Bihar. The programme has influenced 66,508 people in West Bengal, while 167356 people in Bihar. Plans are being developed on strengthening Gram Panchayat level capacity and accountability, ensuring that previous years' work lasts, and scaling up the approach across the two states.
- In line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 on sustainable access to clean water and sanitation to all, WFP's programs are focused on demonstrating that sustainable WASH services are possible to be delivered to everyone in the geographic areas of intervention.
- Training and tools were provided to entrepreneurs on how to maintain and repair different hand pumps. These were then connected to communities, institutions and local government. The program has also promoted the linkage of the NBs with the schools for regular cleaning services through an Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) with the schools. The WATSAN committee have been formed in the high schools, as an initiative for ensuring the WASH services in schools are functional. At the community level, WFP-India had also invested in strengthening the SMCs at public institutional level to ensure that there is community ownership of the infrastructure created and ensure sustainability of the work.
- Till date, there are about 39 JB's & 16 NBs in South 24 Parganas and 106 JB's & 26 NBs in Sheohar.

- **Impact**

While the Jalabandhu program began in South 24 Parganas, due to its success it has since expanded into several other Blocks and Districts. In 2015, Jalabandhu in South 24 Parganas began signing Annual Maintenance Contracts directly with Gram Panchayats and public institutions. Through these contracts, Jalabandhus are assigned approximately 100 water points that they are responsible for maintaining throughout the course of their contract. These contracts provide job security for Jalabandhus, while also ensuring that a defunct hand

pump will be repaired in a timely fashion. As a result, downtime of community water systems has reduced.

• **Challenges and Issues**

- Difficulty in sustenance of some NBs and JB, due to low income levels and poor marketing of JB & NB work
- Need for enhanced training and repair tools to cover subjects like installation of submersibles/handpumps, repair of motors, etc. (in addition to mere repair works) to counter advancing technology and generate additional opportunities

• **Innovation**

- The project is a unique programmatic effort to provide water and sanitation to everyone in targeted districts and municipalities, forever. It means these districts and communities will not need to rely on support from external agencies to address their WASH challenges. It provides a model for greater replication, leading to a push for national full water and sanitation coverage.
- The project creates entrepreneurs out of the community and trains them to live a life of dignity on their own. At the same time, this ensures that the community WASH systems function well.

• **Lessons learnt**

- Community can take care of its resources if empowered and encouraged to do so.
- For sustainability purposes, JB should follow an entrepreneurship model, where they can organize and scale for better credibility & scale.
- JB & NB could be connected to other government programmes, to enhance their income opportunities
- Facilitate in guiding in basic business practices, / entrepreneurs, which would include marketing, financial management, identifying linkages/partners to diversify revenue streams depending on the quantum of work in the current scenario and lend a sustainable and workable business model.

• **Financials**

Not Available

• **Economic sustainability/Revenue Model**

Regular trainings are provided to JB/NB to enhance their skills, to cover subjects like installation of submersibles/handpumps, repair of motors, etc. to help them sustain financially. Additional trainings can be provided to hone their skills further. The project had indirectly also resulted in lesser woman-hours lost in collecting water for household purposes. Besides, the caretakers have been connected to the community and local government institutions, to help lend them an identity and sustainability to their work.

• **Implementer Contact Persons**

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- **Sources and References**

- Company Website