



## Women's Participation in Water Supply and Sanitation

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### Background

Women's Interlink Foundation (WIF), a NGO managed by women committed to improving conditions of economically backward women, children and communities in rural villages and urban slums, undertook several community Water Supply and Sanitation programmes in West Bengal. All projects and programmes were planned, implemented and maintained with active community and women's involvement. It was observed that due to the women users' participation in project activities, the programmes were successfully implemented and maintained.

Author Mrs Aloka Mitra, has initiated and implemented a number of such projects, for WIF. Author Mr AK Dutta, Retd Director, CMDA provided appropriate technical designs based on community needs assessments and baseline surveys. This paper provides some experiences of these projects.

**Geographical Location of Project Areas in WEST BENGAL, INDIA.**

**MAHESHTALA, District 24 Paraganas South, BOLPUR, District Birbhum, RAGHUNATHPUR, District Purulia**

### Community Motivation & Social Mobilisation

□ **Awareness Generation Programmes and Social Mobilisation** in all three areas, initiated and undertaken by WIF were through:

- Advocacy, Mothers Meetings, Community Meetings, Youth Club Meetings, School Awareness Campaign, Rallies, Exhibitions and User Group Meetings.

□ **Human Resource Development**, undertaken by WIF volunteers and field staff, became effective through a process of:

- Training of Masons, Training of Care Takers, Training of User Group members, Orientation courses for ward level functionaries, Orientation of municipality councillors, Training/orientation of Mahila Samities, NGO functionaries and Training of ward level motivators, both male and female.

All of the projects are in urban small and medium size towns with a whole town approach. The Bolpur and Raghunathpur projects are piped water supply

schemes funded by KFW, consultants being GKW of Germany.

In all three project towns, from the pre-site selection stage, men and women are prioritising women's involvement in decision making and consultative participation in planning. The initial response showed encouraging results like:

- Women were quick to grasp and understand an opportunity for improvement in the water supply system.
- They were willing to contribute land for Handpumps/Stand posts.
- Women were eager to take responsibility in water management.
- They were willing to form user groups and collect/contribute funds in order to ensure regular efficient delivery.
- Women were willing to contribute money towards the cost of maintenance of water supply.
- They were willing to learn the methods of O&M of the pumps and stand posts.

### Maheshtala- Integrated Water Supply, Health Education and Sanitation Project.

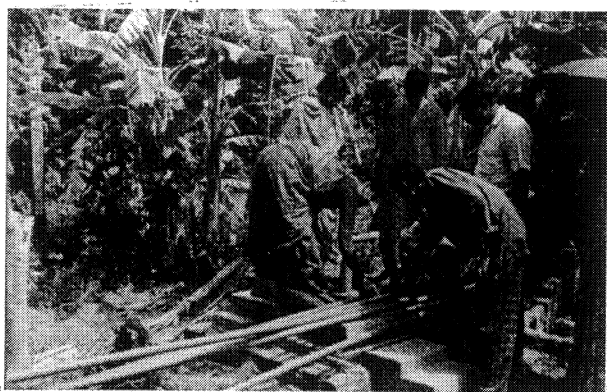
Initially UNICEF and Project Concern International supported the project. As a pilot project in Maheshtala, 24 Paraganas South, WIF has constructed Household latrines in 35 wards, School latrines in 26 wards, Pay and Use Toilets in 3 wards and has sunk Tarapumps in 31 wards of the Municipality.

In the project area Community participation was mobilised through formation of 31 Women's User Groups. Group members were trained in all O&M aspects. Women User Groups are responsible for the O&M of Tarapumps, which are functioning efficiently.

### Feedback on Impact

Each of the Tarapumps is functioning well.

- ◆ The Women User groups bought the parts required for minor repairs.
- ◆ They not only maintained their own Tarapumps but had repaired other pumps.
- ◆ All user families were satisfied with the quality of water.
- ◆ Women users living around the water source ensured



*User Group Members being trained in repairing Tara Pumps.*

that the pump was not misused and that the platform was kept clean.

- ◆ Pits and platforms were repaired and well maintained.
- ◆ They were provided with kits for repair of the pumps.

The success of the Tara Pumps has led to the commissioning and installation of more Tara Pumps by the Municipality through WIF.

#### **As for Sanitation :**

- The school latrines are maintained by the School Committee.
- Women Caretakers from among the community are responsible for the O&M of the Pay & Use Toilets.
- Health education among other results has led to the acceptance of immunisation among resistant groups and no cases of polio were registered in 2001-2002.
- Household toilets made in every ward with no subsidy or a small subsidy component are being utilised effectively.

#### **Bolpur and Raghunathpur Water Supply and Health Education Project**

The Water Supply and Health Education Project, in the above area, is being implemented by WIF in collaboration with the PHED, KFW Bank of Germany and the local bodies concerned. Strategies were developed for involving women in water management through community motivation in institutional development and capacity building at both community and municipality level.

#### *The concepts developed were:*

- Water should be managed as a commodity like other resource.
- The delivery of water services should be of a high standard to facilitate willingness to maintain, operate and finance by users.
- Local bodies will undertake operations and maintenance, recovering costs from user tariff system.

- Community sensitisation and empowerment should be an integral part for a demand responsive, community based, drinking water supply on sustainable basis.

#### *The project process facilitated were:*

- Peoples Participation right from Planning upto monitoring
- Cost recovery.
- Transparency of the entire process
- Promotion of sense of ownership amongst the users.

At Bolpur and Raghunathpur towns, large piped water supply networks are providing water through stand posts and house connection. At Bolpur, 326 stand posts have been installed and 326 Women User Groups have been formed and at Raghunathpur 109 standposts have been installed and 109 Women User Groups have been formed. Minor repairs of the stand posts are to be the responsibility of User Groups and major repairs are the responsibility of Municipality and the PHED.

	Bolpur	Raghunathpur
Slum Community Users	48,000 approx	16350 approx
User Group contribution	Rs 60,000 approx per month @ Rs 11.70 per family.	Rs 30,000 approx per month @ Rs 17.10 per family.

A sustainable financial structure has been developed in both the project areas with women users managing tariff collection and paying to the Municipalities through the banking system. User Group committees collect the monthly tariff, deposit it in banks and transfer to the Municipality for O&M.

Capacity building of the Municipality has resulted in effective sustainable planning of institutional development and O&M system being in place between the PHED, the Municipalities of Bolpur and Raghunathpur and the community. MIS is an important component for sustainable O&M.



*User Group members being trained to collect and pay water tariff.*

Approx 4000 families are expected to take house connection at Bolpur and 1500 at Raghunathpur. At present 2551 households have paid for house connection at Bolpur.

**Appropriate technology:**

Appropriate technical designs were developed for the Pay & Use toilets in consultation with the women users, their preferences, habits and practices and to suit the land availability for each structure. Since Maheshtala had no sewerage systems, leach pits were designed for night soil and soak pits for sullage. Designs were adjusted to suit the soil conditions. Private urinals, bathing and washing facilities were made available, including overhead water tanks, on a low budget located near markets and slums, being maximum need areas.

An average of 200 men and women use the toilets daily, resulting in financial return with proper O&M. The management is undertaken by women caretakers, who support their families under the overall supervision of a local committee and the Municipality.

Taking into consideration women users preference for private family toilet cubicle instead of community latrines, Group Latrines have been designed for a household cluster approach in slums. The Group latrines will provide separate family toilet cubicles with common sewers, pits, water source etc.



*Pay & Use Toilet*

**A Few Observations:**

Women can effectively participate in Water Supply and Sanitation project and also be active managers in the O&M if an appropriate strategy is implemented which involves them and aims at capacity building ensure their participation. It is important that policy makers, planners and development funding agencies keep women's role in water and sanitation well defined and facilitated in order to enable women, men and children to contribute to sustainable long term projects:

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