

Putting community at the center for success – the Chhattisgarh way

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The launch of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) by the Government of India in 2019 created an enabling environment for UNICEF to engage with a local civil society organization, Vasudha Vikash Sansthan (VVS), to steer the community-led piped water supply programme in three of the ten Aspirational Districts of Chhattisgarh – Bastar, Dantewada, Rajnandgaon. The Project was designed to give fillip to the community centred piped water supply (PWS) programme in line with the operational guidelines of the JJM. The Project was planned jointly by UNICEF and the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED), Government of Chhattisgarh, and implemented in 30 gram panchayats (GPs) for a period of one and half years starting August 2019.

Capacity building of key stakeholders: Immediately as the project commenced, the VVS project staff members were given orientations, by UNICEF, on the JJM operational guidelines, various Participatory Learning Approach (PLA) tools for community mobilisation, water quality testing through field test kits, on-site sanitary inspection formats of various drinking water sources, handling of safe drinking water at household level, and Village Action Plan (VAP) preparation. Similar district and block level orientations were organised for PHED officials, that included laboratory personnel, handpump mechanics and key officials of convergent departments. In each Gram Panchayat, one *Jal mitra* was nominated with the support of respective Sarpanches and were trained to promote community awareness at village level. Skills to dialogue with, lead and mobilize the community on integrated water management, and a positive attitude for the promotion of good practices were some of the key criteria of selection of the *Jal mitra*.



Figure 1 Social mapping exercise by community at Dantewada district, Chhattisgarh

Sensitization and strengthening community institutions: Community involvement was crucial for the ownership and monitoring of water supply for equitable and sustainable distribution. It was realized from the inception of the project that the JJM's vision of 'no one left behind' for accessing safe drinking water at home on a sustained basis would be possible so long as community involvement is ensured. In each intervention site, the village community was ensured to be involved in the preparation of VAP, and the social auditing of implementation work. Skills were further developed for at least one person per village for the operation of the pump and basic operation and maintenance (O&M) of the PWS system. A series of focused group discussions (FDG), with different groups of people, door-to-door visits, and other sensitization programmes were organised to promote the adoption of appropriate behaviours for achieving safe drinking water sustainability. *Jal Mitras*, with the support of Sarpanchs, organized meetings in villages where water issues were discussed in Gram Sabhas. Social mapping, water budgeting, seasonality assessment, mapping of water sources with geo tagging, and the demonstration of water quality testing through FTKs were done in villages.

A Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) was formulated in each village. The Sarpanch of the respective GP was made chairperson of the VWSC with a minimum 50 percent membership of women. A deliberate attempt was made for the representation of members from each hamlet including people belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds. VWSC members were oriented on JJM, grey water management, water safety for good health, role and responsibilities of VWSC, various issues around water and convergence schemes that can improve the water, sanitation and environmental situation in their respective villages.

Srimati Manabati, the chairperson of VWSC in **Chhindbahar** village in Bastar district proudly shared, *"We formed the VWSC in March 2020. All the households with piped water supply under JJM program in our village are contributing Rs. 50 each per month, which we deposit in the VWSC account. We pay Rs.1200 per month to the "water person" (pump operator and mechanic) and the rest of the money is kept for minimum operation and maintenance of the piped water supply in the village. Currently we have Rs. 7,000 in our account."*

Village Action Plan Preparation: The format for Village Action Plan, based on the JJM guidelines, was customized for local adaptation and adopted in all 30 Gram Panchayats, prepared with the support of VWSC members, *Jal Mitras* and community based organisations like youth clubs, Self Help Groups and front line workers like AWW and ASHA . The Sarpanchs led this process in which the Subengineers and PHED handpump mechanics were also involved. Special Gram Sabhas were organised to discuss and adopt resolutions for approval of the VAP.

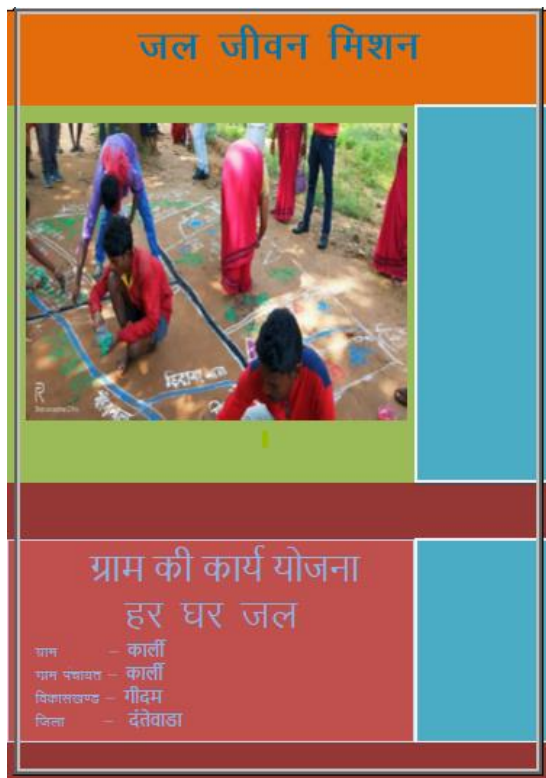


Figure 2 Village Action plan prepared under JJM

The model prepared with the facilitation of VVS team was shared with state and respective districts PHED officials. *“The model village action plan prepared by VVS under the guidance of UNICEF in Rajnandgaon helped us in preparing VAP of other villages in Khairagarh block. Orientation, consultative meetings involving PHED officials, allied departments staffs and community level sensitization program in the early phase of JJM surely helped in better understanding and planning and programme implementation under JJM,”* says Mr. Dinesh Dhruve, Sub Engineer, Khairagarh block of Rajnandgaon district.

Water Quality Monitoring by villagers: One of the important objectives of this project was to create awareness on safe water, the importance of monitoring water quality, popularizing the concept of on-site sanitary inspection of drinking water sources for water safety measures, and train one

villager (*Jal Mitra*) on water quality testing through FTKs. Sanitary inspection of each water source was done along with water testing through FTKs on 9 parameters, and bacteriological contamination tests through H₂S strips. Water testing through FTKs was done before and after the monsoon period. In case any major discrepancy was found, the testing was done through FTKs for correction. Any source found to be contaminated was immediately communicated to sarpanch by *Jal Mitras*. Samples of the contaminated source were sent by the Sarpanch to district water testing laboratory for confirmation.

30 *Jal mitras* (**13 women**), in turn, trained women and SHG groups on water quality testing in their respective Panchayats. Some *Jal Mitras* also supported the PHED in imparting training to women groups in nearby villages. *Jal Mitra*, Mr. Sangeet Ram Yadav from Karli Panchayat, Geedam block of Dantewada district says, *“I really feel good that my learning of water quality testing helped me get a refresher training by PHED, Dantewada. I have trained women of my village and they are now able to test the drinking water facilitated by JJM themselves.”*



Figure 3 Women in Rajnadaon demonstrating water quality results to youths of village

Factors that work: Robust village action planning, community mobilization through various PLA tolls, formation and strengthening of VWSC, representation of all segments of people in VWSC, involvement of local elected representatives of panchayats, and a formal launch of JJM helped in increasing the functional household tap connection (FHTC) coverage in these 30 villages. Ms. Gayatri Parihar, President Vasudha Vikash Sansthan stated, *“Learnings of this project showcase that the active participation of women, equal representation of women in the Village Water Sanitation Committee (VWSC), community involvement in preparation of Village Action Plans, mobilization of community-based organisations, and the creation of young cadre at village level to understand the importance of safe water and skill of testing water quality through FTKs are crucial for strengthening community engagement in JJM implementation.”*

Story of Chindbahar: Piped water supply to end women’s arduous walk for water

Kamla Kashyap’s face beamed with joy at the sight of piped water supply to her village. Kamla, from the Dongri Para hamlet of Chindbahar village in Bastar district, had been eying for this for years. While she has approached elected representatives of her Panchayat for this provision several times in the past, it was not until the launch of the Jal Jeevan Mission that her hopes finally transformed into her reality.

“Women folk of our *para* used to cover around 300 to 400 meters just to fetch water”, she rued. However, efforts taken collectively by the PHED, the Panchayat, women SHGs, the VWSC, and even villagers supported by VVS and UNICEF, bore fruit, she added.

Getting all stakeholders on board: In line with the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), VVS, with support from UNICEF, started working on improving drinking water, sanitation and hygiene issues in Chindbahar. The first step towards achieving the objective was to conduct meetings in villages to discuss with people about their water and sanitation related problems and collect baseline data. The participation of women in the selected villages was overwhelming.

After collecting the basic information, VVS started involving Sarpanchs, Ward Members, Public Health and Engineering Department (PHED) engineers, and members of Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC), and the Village Health & Sanitation Committee (VHSC) for



Figure 4. Water quality testing through FTK by village women in Bastar district, Chhattisgarh

the preparation of Village Development Plans (VDPs). *Jal Mitras* took the lead in involving these people's representatives and community members for developing the plans, which were unanimously approved by the Gram Sabhas.

The process: The VAP that basically laid the foundation for the water supply project was prepared by initiating discussions with the elected local self-government representatives who were made aware on the JJM and the need for preparation of the VAP under this. The next step was to conduct survey and preparation of maps adopting Participatory Learning Appraisal (PLA) method in all villages covered under the project. This was done by the *Jal Mitras* and VWSC members, with active participation of the community.

The plans were presented before the Gram Sabhas for approval, following which, the PHED started the work towards the provision of drinking water. In Chhindbahar village, pipeline was laid and connected to the overhead water tank. Likewise, a motor was fitted in a bore-well in Padarchangni hamlet to provide drinking water to the households through the pipeline. Pipe laying works are also ongoing in other hamlets of the village to provide water to the households at doorstep.

“The activities taken up in the villages and the participatory process adopted have generated awareness among the villagers, which in future will ensure active participation of villagers in

planning and implementation of other development activities and would also sustain the existing PWS in the village under JJM,” said Ram Charan, field coordinator of VVS.



Figure 5 VWSC meeting facilitated by field coordinator, VVS