



Sustaining the Government of India's efforts/investments in **WASH**

As India is in the final year of national programmes on rural drinking water supply and sanitation, it is a good time to take stock to understand what has worked well and where attention is needed to ensure sustainable WASH services, going beyond building infrastructure.

Towards this end, WASH sector organizations conducted several workshops to reflect on the state of the sector, examining the issue from five perspectives.



The objectives were

01. Collaborate with sector partners to dialogue about water, sanitation, and hygiene beyond infrastructure coverage, focusing on the sustainability of the services and the system strengthening required for the same to ensure progress towards the SDGs;
02. To engage sector partners and government (national and state) in the assessment, jointly developing the tools and framework, and identifying locations for qualitative data collection;
03. Identify areas for system strengthening and strategic investment by sector partners and the government for sustainable services (external).

Key messages

- a. Ensure long-term planning for a demand-led approach.
- b. Support the official 'foot-soldiers of WASH' with a community cadre.
- c. Integrate climate change mitigation into WASH and ensure adequate technical and financial support.
- d. Set up a learning and knowledge exchange forum to share experiences across the country and between the government and CSOs.
- e. Engage the community in the planning and implementation of WASH projects.

Methodology

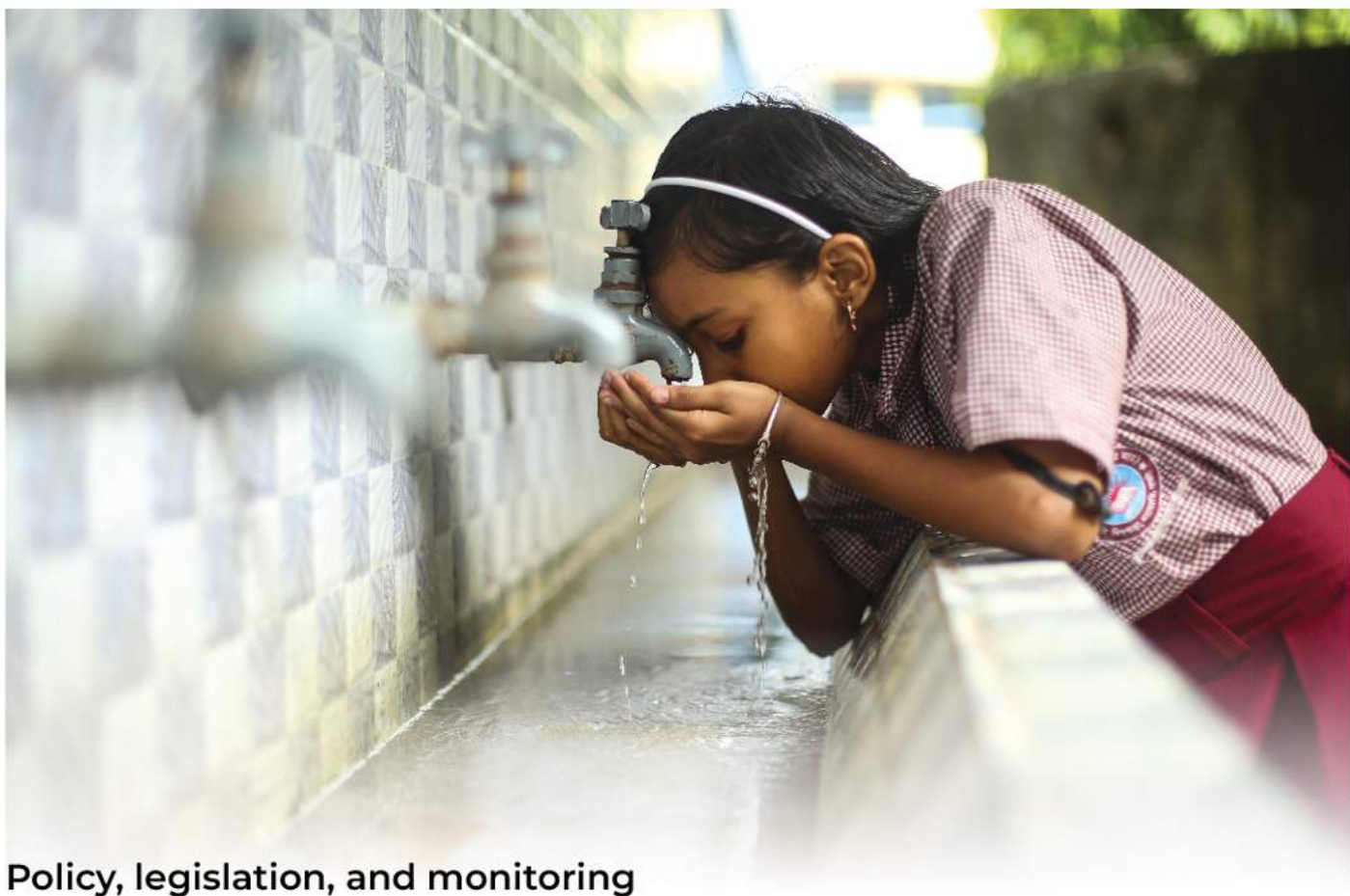


Findings

Table 1: Findings from the discussions

Component	Water	Sanitation	Hygiene
Policy, legislation and monitoring	3.00	2.89	1.42
Institutions, planning and finance	2.51	2.43	1.64
Infrastructure and serviese	2.79	2.60	2.18
Water resource management and climate change	1.94	1.78	1.78
Learning and adaptation	1.90	2.04	1.70

Colour Score range: ■ 1.0 - 1.8 ■ 1.8 - 2.6 ■ 2.6 - 3.4



Policy, legislation, and monitoring

- There are several useful guidelines and supportive documents available to facilitate the implementation of JJM and SBM. However, they do not address the interrelation between the water and sanitation service chains, which could hamper the sustainability of the services. Similarly, water and sanitation policies, guidelines, and monitoring systems do not address hygiene adequately.
- Frequent policy changes, delays in fund disbursement, and a lack of clarity on funding for the costs associated with the life-cycle of the services (O&M costs and capital maintenance costs) adversely impact the implementation of the schemes.
- In terms of monitoring, there are detailed guidelines for data collection and validation for water and sanitation services. However, the lack of standardized data across the states leaves little scope for comparison, learning, and exchange.

Institutions, planning, and finance

- There are available skilled and trained human resources (e.g., SBM Swachhagrahis), which remain to be optimally leveraged, especially their expertise in Behaviour Change Communication at the local level.
- The mission-mode of implementation of water and sanitation programs undermines institutional strengthening, which is required for sustainable services.
- Community engagement in preparing implementation plans is limited. The plans, thus, are often not reflective of the needs and demands of the community. This can jeopardize the sustainability of the services. Further, plans are often prepared only annually, thus lacking the long-term perspective required to keep services ongoing.
- There are no budgets allocated for long-term maintenance of capital investments, which would ensure meeting service delivery indicators. Further, there is limited clarity on which funds are meant for which activity (for instance, what are NREGA, or Finance Commission, CSR funds to be used for?)

Infrastructure and services

- JJM and SBM are 'universal access' missions without special provisions for marginalized communities, other than extra central budgets for certain geographic areas. Marginalized groups are often not part of oversight committees or involved in decision making. Thus, the infrastructure built, and the services provided miss out on ensuring equity and inclusivity.
- The service-level benchmarks (such as the quantum of water to be supplied) provided are not binding; they serve as a guideline without any compulsion to adhere.

Water resource management and climate change

- WASH services are closely related to climate change. However, the two missions do not recognize or address the impact of climate change on WASH.
- There is a lack of awareness about the impact of climate change on WASH, from community members to local government representatives to district officials. Consequently, plans prepared and projects implemented do not factor in climate-related changes, which have an impact on the sustainability of the services.
- Implementation support agencies at the local level lack the expertise to mitigate the impact of climate change on WASH.
- In most states, the local water management institutions (such as water users associations, farmer water groups, etc.) that play a critical role in managing the use of water and taking ownership of village assets and resources are not functional.

Learning and adaptation

- There are limited institutionalized platforms for information exchange on WASH for learning and adaptation (such as periodic review meetings for government officials). There are no institutionalized platforms for communities to partake, exchange experiences, network with each other, and collaborate.

While disaggregated data is available, it is not used effectively for planning, decision-making, or troubleshooting. Communities are not engaged in data validation.

- Research studies by institutes and development partners often focus on a particular geography with a small sample size. They are seldom of national character, which limits their use in decision-making and planning.



Recommendations

Component 1: Policy, legislation, and monitoring

Immediate

Strengthening monitoring - To improve monitoring for drinking water and sanitation programmes at the national and state levels, data must include usability, functionality, and equity in addition to coverage. Data must be made more transparent and linked to monitoring. Data to monitor hygiene should also be regularly collected.

Long-term

Funding: To ensure the long-term sustainability of rural drinking water supply and sanitation programmes, the government must clarify the funding sources for the different costs associated with the life-cycle of the service, particularly operations and maintenance (O&M) and capital maintenance costs. These need to be supported by efficient monitoring and well-defined roles and responsibilities.

Convergence: A framework for the convergence of different ministries and/or departments is needed on policy and programmatic issues as well as wider stakeholder engagement. Components of hand hygiene need to be incorporated into select schemes of different ministries.

Component 2: Institutions, planning and finance

Immediate

Collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Forestry, and Climate Change (MoEFCC): The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation needs to collaborate with MoEFCC to tackle climate change. One of the key areas is source sustainability, which should incorporate a wetland/surface water conservation strategy.

Planning processes: Annual implementation plans need to be made bottom-up with a strong behaviour change component. Equity, inclusion, and the consequences of climate change must be taken into consideration in planning and execution. A long-term perspective should be incorporated into the plan for sustainable services.

Upskilling human resources: available skilled human resources (such as SBM Swachhagrahis) can be leveraged for behaviour change communication or upskilled to carry out maintenance of WASH assets.

Long-term

Institutions: Trained, competent, and adequate numbers of staff are required across the hierarchy, with clear roles and responsibilities. Officials must collaborate with the local government, civil society, and community-based organizations.



Component 3: Infrastructure and Services

Immediate

Communities need to be empowered to monitor infrastructure and services. Communities must be enabled to carry out project oversight and informed and educated about procurement procedures.

Long-term

Ensuring equity: Equity must be ensured in the infrastructure being built and services being provided. Specific instructions on how to ensure equity and inclusion, such as ensuring access to people with disabilities, elders, and pregnant women, and how to monitor the same, must be included in manuals. This can be achieved through clarity in policies and implementation.

Quality of work: The process of contracting, payment, and monitoring the quality of work needs to be more transparent to improve the quality of outputs.

Component 4: Water resource management and climate change

Immediate

Climate resilience: There must be specific budget allocations for building climate-resilient infrastructure, support for which should come from MOEFCC. There must be adequate provisions for community awareness and capacity building.

Long-term

Climate change adaptation: Rural drinking water and sanitation programmes should have well-articulated and detailed strategies for mitigating/adapting to the impacts of climate change. Additionally, the WASH department and personnel should be prepared for climate change impact. The implementation support agencies should be encouraged to develop competence to mitigate the effects of climate change by instituting climate fellows.

Water quality: Water management and quality control laws must be implemented more effectively. Community-level institutions must be capacitated and supported for the same.

Component 5: Learning and adaptation

Immediate

Community engagement in verification: Improve ground-level data collection for accuracy and implement a verification process with community engagement, that can also empower communities to use the data for planning and monitoring. Community members should be trained so that they can monitor issues such as ease of funding, quality of work by contractors, adequate WASH facilities and water quality and quantity.

Institutionalizing learning processes: Water and sanitation services are ongoing and will be required in perpetuity. A systematic learning approach with stakeholders at multiple levels should be instituted.

Long-term

Research framework: Organizations working on WASH and related sectors should collaborate to pursue qualitative research on a common framework, to facilitate exchange and learning, thereby elevating the quality and credibility of research.

National knowledge network: A national knowledge network should be created that can bring out voices from the grassroots and facilitate cross-learning. Its utility can be increased by training and learning exchanges.





A Case for Hand Hygiene

There is lack of a comprehensive policy or strategy at the national level to promote the adoption of hand hygiene. There is no nodal ministry at the centre to lead hand hygiene initiatives. There is, additionally, lack of capacity to understand the significance of hygiene and accordingly plan, budget, and implement strategies for hygiene promotion, from the grassroot level to the central ministry. There is very limited data on hygiene available (for instance, tap water supply in schools for handwashing). Thus, there needs to be a comprehensive policy or strategy for hand hygiene, addressing infrastructure needs along with behavioural requirements. There needs to be designated ministry to spearhead hand hygiene initiatives. At the same time, convergence of different relevant ministries is required to leverage hand hygiene initiatives. Capacity building initiatives are required for all, from the grassroots to the ministry level to understand the importance, and accordingly plan, budget and implement initiatives. Further, a comprehensive mechanism is required to monitor hand hygiene, including functionality of infrastructure as well as practice.