

Gender-inclusive initiatives from Maharashtra, India

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Figure 1 – SHG women in Sinnar, Maharashtra, Source: CWAS, CEPT University.

Summary

Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH) plays an important role when it comes to improving gender inclusivity. To translate the spirit of current national guidelines that look at gender perspectives in sanitation into robust on-ground policies, it is important to design a framework that meaningfully engages women and girls across the sanitation service delivery chain.

Maharashtra is the second-most urbanized state in India accounting for 10% of India's population. The Government of Maharashtra has taken proactive measures to empower women and contribute towards the welfare of marginalized communities through various policies and institutional frameworks. In the ongoing work, as part of [Swachh Bharat Mission \(SBM\) 2.0](#), while

construction of Individual Household Toilets (IHHT) or Community Toilet/Public Toilet (CT/PT) facilitates access to sanitation infrastructure, efforts have also been made to increase women's agency and move towards transformation. The state has legislated that 50% of elected representatives at local level should be women. The state policy envisages both top-down and bottom-up approaches in strengthening women's participation across the sanitation service chain and facilitating women's access to opportunities both at local/ community level and at state level.

The ["Gender Responsive Guidelines under Swachh Maharashtra Mission \(Urban\)"](#) urge cities to focus on including voices of women in national policies and generating employment opportunities for women, and to look at possible policy convergences and behavioural change to bring inclusion for women in to the mainstream.

This case study outlines the initiatives undertaken by cities in Maharashtra, which contribute towards an ecosystem to empower women through effective institutional systems. They also serve as examples that can be replicated and scaled up to other cities in similar contexts. Based on these pioneer interventions, women in Maharashtra are already leading compared to other states, as there is immense opportunity for them to become engaged in Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM).

Overview

Geographical information

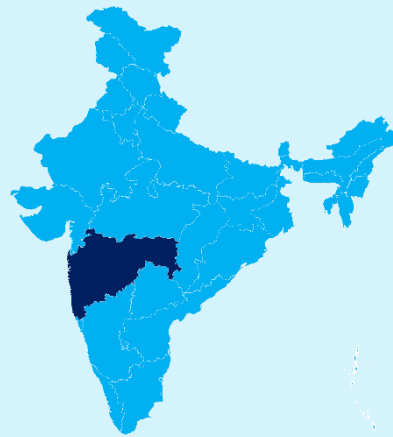
Country: India

State: Maharashtra

City population: 120 million (approx.

according to Unique Identification

Authority of India.



Problem

- When it comes to the consequences of poor sanitation, women have always been considered as the most vulnerable group which not only restricts their mobility, safety and privacy but also hinders progress towards a dignified lifestyle.

Solution

- Provisions at state level for moving from access and agency to transformation.
- Engaging Self Help Groups (SHGs) with Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) for sanitation solid waste and FSSM awareness activities.
- Provision of credit by enabling access to individual household toilets.
- Initiatives towards welfare of sanitation workers.
- Involvement of NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to support ULBs' own initiatives.

Problem

Maharashtra is one of the few states in India that have enacted laws to ensure equal representation of women in the elected wing of city governments, and as presidents of councils. However, despite the equal representation, these women political leaders are often not sufficiently empowered and enabled. Thus, they are unable to respond fully to the needs of local governance. Women in such leadership positions also face discrimination and bias when it comes to decision-making, often due to their lack of experience of local politics, compounded by inadequate, technical and administrative knowledge. This leads to decisions being taken by a selected dominant few. Thus, the intent of the law in empowering women in local governance is

not really fulfilled. This problem is intersectional in nature and often affects women at all levels, both at the decision-making level and those in administrative positions implementing programmes and policies.

At the community level also, there is representation of women through the women's self-help groups (SHGs), which are mostly composed of women from low income and marginalized groups. Maharashtra is one of the few states in India which has a strong SHG network. However, when it comes to empowering them with livelihood opportunities, there is inequitable treatment. Women's SHGs face bias in getting formal contracts and other livelihood opportunities. This intersectional problem proves to be a barrier in developing their collective agency.

At the household level, men often take major decisions on access to sanitation without adequate involvement of women counterparts. As a result, women and girls have to use shared toilet facilities which pose risk to their overall health and wellbeing. This particularly also affects their menstrual hygiene management (MHM) needs.

Solution

1. Inclusivity and building women agencies in Maharashtra.

Beyond enabling access to sanitation facilities for women through individual household toilets, the state has also made provisions that encourage women's political representation, enabling them to make informed choices. Positive examples of women who have become transformational leaders to reshape the perception of women as active participants in the decision-making process rather than merely beneficiaries have been highlighted. In Maharashtra, 50% of seats in councils and corporations are reserved for women which encourages their active engagement. This also reflects in the hierarchy of sanitation and solid waste management sector by enabling women to become leaders and taking leadership.

In cities like Pune, Thane and Mumbai, gender-responsive-budget-related workshops have been carried out in order to improvise the municipal budget using the lens of gender inclusivity, instead of preparing a separate budget for it.

In order to sensitize women representatives across the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and enable their participation around administrative decision making, various workshops have been conducted by various city governments in association with the Center for Water and Sanitation.

In November 2020, the Center for Water and Sanitation in association with All India Institute of Local Self Government (AIILSG), conducted a workshop to sensitize elected women representatives of all the ULBs in Maharashtra.

Wai Municipal Council has conducted workshops to build capacity of women councillors for effective functioning and participation in local governance focusing Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM).

2. Engaging SHGs with Urban Local Governments for sanitation, solid waste and Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM) awareness activities.

Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are acknowledged as one of the major components in the supply of sanitary value chain in cities throughout Maharashtra. While policy convergence at the state level can help to codify and improve involvement, city-level initiatives have been crucial in helping to understand how engagement can be implemented on the ground.

For instance, SHG women were awarded the contract to maintain the public toilets and common toilets across the city of Hingoli, which proved to be a great success and gained a remarkable degree of satisfaction among the residents.

These SHGs participate in door-to-door waste collection, waste segregation and composting-related activities in cities such as Bhadrabati. Currently, the ULB is figuring out how to include these women in Faecal Sludge Treatment Plant (FSTP) site-related activities. The ULB has designated them as Swachhta Tai in Tuljapur, and to uplift them, the best Swachhta Tai is recognized annually.

The women SHG representatives in Wani established the "Stayfine" enterprise to produce sanitary napkins. These are distributed in local schools, colleges and village councils in addition to being sold door-to-door by ASHA (Accredited Social Health Workers) employees.

There are numerous additional cities in Maharashtra where SHGs are actively involved in operations connected to the sanitation value chain. The convergence of Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) and the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) strengthens the relationship at the state level.

3. Provision of Sanitation Credit –enabling access by collectivizing women.

During the construction of individual household toilets, many beneficiaries complained that the SBM subsidy amount is not enough to build their entire toilet. Hence, in order to bridge the gap between subsidy and financial access, women's self-help groups were formed with the support of Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal (MAVIM) and National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) to

mobilize loans from cooperative banks. The newly created SHG groups also received training on toilet design to fit the population, design of septic tanks and cost effectiveness from technical specialists.

4. Initiatives towards welfare of the frontline sanitation warriors.

In the WASH sector, sanitation workers are certainly the most vulnerable group. Given that they are still at the bottom of the pyramid, sanitation workers' welfare is crucial to improving the sanitation services. In Maharashtra the workers are empowered through capacity building related to sanitary infrastructure and top-down welfare programmes. Workshops and health campaigns are held annually in cities like Wai and Khopali to educate the sanitation workers on the sanitation ecosystem, proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) usage, and occupational health consequences, Figure 3 a, b and c demonstrate some of these activities. As COVID-19 spread, a Government Resolution was introduced which declared that the wages of the sanitation workers would not be compromised due to the pandemic. SHG women from cities like Kalmeshwar, Wani and Dhule were involved in making sanitation masks during the pandemic.



Figure 2a – Initiatives undertaken by various cities across the state. Source: CWAS, CEPT University.



Figure 2b – L-R – SHG worker contracted for road sweeping with PPE gear and PPE distribution to sanitation workers. Source: CWAS, CEPT University.

5. Involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations and Community-based Organizations to support Urban Local Government's own initiatives:

While the state is taking proactive measures to sustain provisions towards inclusive sanitation service in Maharashtra, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have collaborated with ULBs in select cities to fortify the execution of ongoing programmes. Women empowerment organizations like Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandala (MAVIK) plays a crucial role to mobilize and build organization of women, uplifting their dignity and enhancing their capacity through training. They also help to increase involvement of women into education and increase their active participation in decision making. Triratna Prerana Mandal is another Mumbai based CBO that works for sustainable and inclusive public toilet pivoting around solid waste management as an opportunity to generate livelihood and building capacity of women in the society. There are also capacity building workshops conducted by various NGOs and CBO across the state to sensitize women organizations regarding safe and sustainable sanitation practice.

Lessons learned

In spite of taking various state and grass-root level initiatives for building agency for women and moving towards transformations, here are some key takeaways that can be undertaken further to strengthen the gender inclusivity approach in the WASH sector in Maharashtra. The key lessons learned from this intervention are:

- While SBM has provided gender responsive guidelines, the same principles should be adhered to by the state level agencies.

- Formalizing Menstrual Hygiene Management infrastructure (supplies and knowledge building) within sanitation infrastructure is an important component to better access. Although the state has some infrastructure, these programmes need to be scaled up and reproduced with a focus on knowledge creation among men and women.
- Provision of gender appropriate PPE kits and a medical insurance facility for all the on-roll and contractual staff members is required. Using a public-private partnership (PPP) paradigm, inclusive sanitation infrastructure that focuses on women's menstrual health and hygiene can be implemented. Beyond women's SHGs, marginalized communities like transgender people are an unexplored demographic that can participate. Minority caste-based groups must also be collectively organized and involved in the provision of sanitary services. Representation

Useful links

https://cwas.org.in/resources/file_manager/State%20Gender%20Interventions.pdf

https://cwas.org.in/resources/file_manager/Gender%20Interventions%20for%20Sanitation%20in%20Wai.pdf

https://cwas.org.in/resources/file_manager/workshop_report_for_training_of_elected_women_representatives_wai_municipal_council.pdf

Further reading and references

- CWAS, CEPT University. (2020). Universal individual household toilets in slums and vulnerable urban areas: Perspectives and possibilities, Center for Water and Sanitation, CRDF, CEPT University, Ahmedabad. Link: https://cwas.org.in/resources/file_manager/reaching_the_unserved_access_to_individual_households_toilets_in_vulnerable_urban_areas.pdf
- CWAS, CEPT University. (2021). Catalyzing Locally Driven Strategies in Mumbai Slums for WASH. Link: https://cwas.org.in/resources/file_manager/catalysing_locally_driven_strategies_in_mumbai_slums.pdf

About the author

Dr Meera Mehta is Professor Emeritus at CEPT University and Center Head, CWAS. She has 45 years of experience in housing, urban development and infrastructure finance. Her experience spans Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. She has been a consultant for many agencies including UNICEF, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, WaterAid, the Government of Netherlands and has been a member of various national and international technical committees. She studied Architecture and Urban Planning and has a PhD in Economics.

Dr Dinesh Mehta is Professor Emeritus at CEPT University and Center Head, CWAS. He has 40 years of experience in urban policy, planning, governance, WASH and infrastructure finance in Asia and Africa. He has worked for many agencies such as UN-HABITAT, National Institute of Urban Affairs, WaterAid, Asian Development Bank, World Bank and has been a member of various national and international technical committees. He has a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania, master's degree in City and Regional Planning from Harvard University and is a Civil Engineer from Indian Institute Of Technology India.

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Saubiya Sareshwala is a research associate at CWAS. She has experience in various aspects of municipal finance like budgets, investment planning, property tax, and gender budgeting. She is currently exploring the idea of shadow credit rating for urban local bodies and climate finance. She also works in the water sector, offering city-level support in preparing water-secure and water balance plans. She holds a Master's degree in Urban Planning with infrastructure specialization from CEPT University and a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from LJ Institute of Engineering & Technology with one year of experience in teaching and academics. Her areas of interest include financing urban development, climate finance, and participatory WASH governance.

About the institution / organisation

The **Center for Water and Sanitation (CWAS)** is a part of CEPT Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) at CEPT University. CWAS undertakes action-research, implementation support, capacity building and advocacy in the field of urban water and sanitation. Acting as a thought catalyst and facilitator, CWAS works closely with all levels of governments - national, state and local to support them in delivering water and sanitation services in an efficient, effective and equitable manner. <https://cwas.org.in/>

About the IWA Inclusive Urban Sanitation Initiative

IWA's Inclusive Urban Sanitation initiative responds to a huge and growing public need - safe sanitation in combination with access to safe drinking water and hygiene underpins good health. The aim of this initiative is reshaping the global urban sanitation agenda by focusing on inclusive sanitation service goals--and the service systems required to achieve them - rather than the traditional singular focus on expanding sewer networks and treatment works. This forms part of IWA's larger agenda to promote inclusive, resilient, water-wise, and sanitation-secure cities.

About the Inclusive Urban Sanitation Stories

The Inclusive Urban Sanitation stories are documenting some of the policies, practices, and approaches that demonstrate how stakeholders especially those in urban areas (e.g., public sector, operators, academics, regulators, and other key actors) are taking part or contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 6 which require water and sanitation concepts and norms to look beyond technology and the usual focus on building infrastructure. Increased focus is on safety, inclusion, environment, public health, and multiple technology solutions tailored to different geographies and socio-economic contexts for building climate-resilient cities. The stories aim to inspire urban stakeholders to discuss ways for advancing inclusive urban sanitation, especially in low- and middle-income countries.