

# RISING TOGETHER

COMMUNITIES LEAD SANITATION







# WOMEN LEAD TOILET CONSTRUCTION IN JHARKHAND

In the early 2010s, Jharkhand faced significant challenges in battling the critical issue of **Open Defecation**. Open Defecation posed a threat to **public health and dignity**, disproportionately impacting **women and marginalised communities**. In 2014, the Swachh Bharat Mission ignited a national effort to improve access to toilets and tackle open defecation. Even as toilet construction ramped up, districts in Jharkhand encountered roadblocks due to an **acute shortage of skilled masons** who were willing to work in toilet construction.

To bridge this gap, the Drinking Water and Sanitation Department, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Livelihood Mission, initiated a program for **women masons** aimed at **engaging them in construction of toilets**. This effort began in four districts and was eventually scaled up across the state. The socially innovative program, known as **Rani Mistry - translating to 'Queen Mason'** - empowers women to become skilled masons through comprehensive training, and enter a role traditionally dominated by men. Beyond providing over 50,000 women with skills and remunerative opportunities, the Rani Mistry initiative challenges entrenched social perceptions of labour and gender.



TOILET  
CONSTRUCTION



50,000  
WOMEN TRAINED



SOCIAL NORMS  
CHALLENGED



The Rani Mistry initiative exemplifies how community involvement can drive impactful social change. Having achieved Open Defecation Free (ODF) status through a community-driven approach, Jharkhand is now focused on sustaining and enhancing its sanitation systems.

There are valuable lessons to be learned from other states, such as Odisha, which has integrated communities across the sanitation value chain while prioritising their livelihoods, safety, and inclusion.

# COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS

## Odisha's Journey Towards Generating Sanitation Livelihoods and Inclusive Service Delivery

Odisha's sanitation journey has been characterised by a dedicated effort to establish sustainable and inclusive sanitation solutions, notably through the pioneering setup of Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants (FSTPs) across the state. With a progressive vision to address faecal sludge management (FSM) challenges effectively, Odisha has successfully implemented 119 FSTPs in all its 115 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). Notably, Odisha stands out as the only state in India with a decentralised approach to sewage treatment through FSTPs, emphasising non-sewered and easy-to-use technology models involving and empowering communities across the sanitation value chain.

In the process of scaling up Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM) across the state, a significant challenge arose in terms of securing **skilled and economically feasible human resources** to maintain those facilities, particularly for the smaller ULBs. A majority of commercial, private contractors operated from outside of Odisha, and very few local agencies were interested in the Operation & Maintenance (O&M) of treatment facilities. Use, maintenance and **sustainability of infrastructure became a concern**. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when **livelihood opportunities** in the state took a massive hit, especially for marginalised communities, the Government of Odisha initiated a powerful community engagement exercise.

The state already had a robust **ecosystem of Self Help Groups**, facilitated by the dedicated department of **Mission Shakti** which oversaw the engagement, welfare and capacity building of both rural and urban SHGs. Mission Shakti aims to enable the socio-economic empowerment of women through gainful activities by providing credit support and facilitating market linkages. Nearly 70 lakh women in the state have been organised into 6 lakh groups thus far.



Recognising the potential of these SHGs, combined with easy-to-use, intuitive technology, it was determined that with the appropriate techno-managerial training, SHGs could effectively manage FSTPs. Thus Mission Shakti Groups emerged with specific focus on empowering women SHGs and other vulnerable groups in the State. With over 2,000 SHGs engaged, this innovative approach has not only addressed challenges of livelihood and service delivery but also fostered sustainable community involvement in faecal sludge management.



# PROCESS FLOW FOR ENGAGING SELF HELP GROUPS (SHGS)



Urban Local Bodies **invite applications** for the operation and maintenance of an FSTP, to which interested SHGs can respond by **expressing their interest**.

01

02

After receiving interest from SHGs, they are given a small orientation which involves an **exposure visit** to an FSTP to observe its functioning.



SHGs which are still interested post the orientation, go through a **test and interview**. In the final stages of selection numerous aspects are gauged to select the right SHG, which is equipped for the job such as quality of paperwork, group dynamics, aspirations, etc.

03

04

Upon selection, they undergo a **3-day classroom training** on O&M, troubleshooting, safety measures and reporting.



This is followed by a **2-month onsite training** at the FSTP for which they receive a **stipend**.

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Post this there is a **joint discussion on clauses of contract** between the ULB and the SHG to address concerns by both parties.



Lastly, a **service contract** is signed to hand over the O&M from ULB to SHG.

07

# INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING TOWARDS PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

## CHALLENGES IN ENGAGING SHGS IN SERVICE DELIVERY



### Challenges at a ULB Level

- **Contractual Ambiguity:** Contracts often lacked clear delineations of roles and responsibilities between SHGs and ULBs
- **Perceived Incompetence:** ULB officials expressed concerns about SHGs' technical capabilities and their ability to withstand payment delays
- **Limited Training Opportunities:** There was a dearth of training programs to equip SHGs with entrepreneurial skills and managerial acumen
- **Facility Management:** The process of handling and managing sanitation facilities was not streamlined.



### Challenges for SHGs

- **Payment Irregularities:** SHGs faced significant challenges due to irregular and delayed payments, which they were unable to absorb.
- **Managerial Capacity Building:** SHGs required support in developing managerial skills, including proficiency in legal documentation, invoice generation, and report maintenance.
- **Pilot Contracts:** Pilot-based contracts often resulted in reduced profitability for SHGs and were not viable
- **Contractual Disadvantage:** Contracts were frequently not conducive to the interests and needs of SHGs.



## ► Equitable Service Contracts

The Service Contract provides a clear **delineation of responsibilities** between the Self-Help Group (SHG) and the Urban Local Body (ULB). Within this framework, the SHG is exclusively responsible for delivering services to keep the FSTP functional, while all aspects of major or minor repairs and the provisioning of supplies necessary for operation and maintenance fall under the purview of the ULB. The service contract outlines the following key provisions:



### Quarterly Health Check-ups & Health Insurance

The service contract includes provisions for regular monthly health check-ups for SHG members, coupled with provision of health insurance coverage. This comprehensive healthcare support ensures the well-being of those involved in FSTP operation.



### Timely Remuneration

ULBs across the state diligently adhere to the practice of disbursing payments by the 7th of each month. Timely remuneration is key to maintaining smooth operation, given that SHGs have limited financial capacity to be able to absorb delays in payments.



### Provision of Essential Monthly Supplies

The ULB is responsible for supplying the necessary materials required to operate and maintain the FSTP on a monthly basis. This commitment guarantees the seamless functioning of the facility with clear demarcation of responsibilities and costs between ULBs and SHGs.



### Distribution of PPE and Identity Cards

To establish a **formal system of recognition for livelihoods**, the service contract includes the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits and identity cards. This initiative prioritises the safety and welfare of workers engaged.



## ► Training the Trainer



Capacity Building initiatives are carried out to enable members of Self Help Groups to become **master trainers**. They, in turn, deliver trainings to impart their learnings to the rest of the group, this has proven to be an effective process due to **greater trust and relatability** they enjoy within the group. To foster an equitable and inclusive learning experience, a key learning emerged; to ensure inclusion and gender-sensitivity in training through friendly training sessions, provision of facilities such as lounges, insurance, etc.




## IMPACTFUL SANITATION SERVICE DELIVERY THROUGH SHGs

Benefits of SHGs as Service Providers in sanitation in Odisha's experience of engaging SHGs in delivery of different urban services



### ► Enhanced Worker Wellbeing

	<b>Safety First</b>	Uniforms, PPE kits, dedicated lounges with lockers, and separate washrooms for all sanitation workers
	<b>Health Focus</b>	Regular health check-up camps for SHG members

### ► Social and Financial Security

	<b>Income Boost</b>	2X increase in average earnings
	<b>Timely Incentives</b>	Monthly and performance-based incentives reaching workers by the 7th of each month

### ► Improved Service Delivery

	<b>Infrastructure Maintenance</b>	Improved maintenance of sanitation infrastructure owing to fixed accountability
	<b>Increased Revenue</b>	Increase in revenue generation from sale of compost



**Mantu Naik, Community Toilet Operator, Odisha**

"After I joined the OMM SAI Self-help Group, I have gotten a skills enhancement training and have also become more aware about my safety at work and know about my rights. Additionally, I was able to get access to other schemes for my family as well- I got bank account under PMJDY, insurance under PM Suraksha Bima Yojana. Being part of the SHG has given us the opportunity to start a sanitation-based livelihood of operating & maintaining community toilets in Dhenkanal. This has helped increase our monthly income. I feel proud to be called an entrepreneur now."



## STATEWIDE SCALE-UP



In 2020, 8 FSTPs were entrusted to Self-Help Groups (SHGs), with **Bahucharamata being the pioneer transgender SHG engaged in sanitation-related endeavours**. To date, the count has surged to 103, out of which 8 are overseen by transgender collectives. The inaugural quartet of FSTPs, situated within municipal corporations of Cuttack, Sambalpur, Berhampur, and Baripada, thus served as **"lighthouses"** instrumental in comprehending the requisites of SHGs in terms of capacity building, guidance, and navigating their associations with the respective Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). The insights garnered from the initial 4 ULBs played a pivotal role in expanding the model to other ULBs in the state.

The accomplished SHGs involved in FSM activities have opened doors to additional employment avenues, such as tax collection and water ATMs, owing to the government's trust in their capabilities. Furthermore, when exposure visits are arranged, these SHGs convey a powerful societal message. Observers witness women and transgender individuals efficiently operating these facilities, well-equipped with proper training.

Non-sewered sanitation is **prevalent among Tier 2 and 3 cities**, which constitute a substantial portion of the urban landscape not only in Odisha but also the entire country. There is potential for Odisha's SHG Model to be replicated across other states which are facing similar concerns in ensuring sustainability and greater community ownership over on-site sanitation systems.



"Our SHG started off with the production of home-based phenyl and soap and went on to volunteer with NGOs to raise awareness on health and sanitation. Our work earned us recognition from the Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC), and we were selected by them to operate and maintain the Septage Treatment Plant (SeTP) in the city. This responsibility is like a crown on our SHG and our biggest achievement. It provided us with financial stability, dignified livelihood and recognition. All my life I had faced abuse, discrimination and isolation; being in the sanitation sector and our collaboration with CMC became a massive validation of my potential and identity."

- Sheetal Bastia,  
Secretary, SHG Bahucharamata

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Change to discover more  
such stories!



The NFSSM Alliance is dedicated to advancing inclusive and safe sanitation practices across India, by driving discourse, shaping policy, and supporting governments at all levels in enhancing human waste management. Formed in 2016, the Alliance initially worked towards driving national discourse on Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM).

Today, the Alliance has become a key platform for collaboration, bringing together the expertise of over 35 diverse organisations, including NGOs, CSOs, academic institutions, and think tanks. Through this collective effort, the Alliance drives innovation in urban sanitation planning, infrastructure development, service delivery, and climate resilience, ensuring safe, inclusive, and equitable sanitation outcomes for all.

In its pursuit of nationwide impact, the Alliance has recently expanded its reach to new geographies with support from the Viega Foundation.



Scan the QR code to visit the website for more information



The Urban Management Centre (UMC)'s vision is to provide sustainable solutions for local governments, improving citizens' quality of life. They assist state and local governments in India with implementing urban management. Their expertise lies in capacity building, training, and creating practical solutions. UMC is focused on aiding local governments in implementation of inclusive sanitation.



[nfssmalliance.org](http://nfssmalliance.org)