



## Alirajpur District, India, Achieves ODF Status

### SUMMARY

14.7% of India's tribal peoples reside in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh. Historically these tribal groups have been marginalized, socially and economically restricted, and their access to basic services has been disproportionately lower than that of the wider population. To tackle this inequality and demonstrate how a remote, hard to reach tribal area can benefit from sustained WASH interventions, Alirajpur was selected as an intervention site under the wider Swachh Bharat Mission. As a result, the district's progress saw sanitation coverage jump from 27% in 2014 to 50% in 2016/17 and Alirajpur was declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) in March 2018.

### Introduction

Madhya Pradesh, India's sixth most populous state, has historically fared poorly on development indicators such as infant mortality, literacy, sex ratio and nutrition. It has also been a slow mover in terms of access and usage of sanitation in rural areas. The 2011 census ranked the state as the second lowest performer in the country in terms of access to WASH facilities.

The state is home to 14.7% of India's tribal peoples. Marginalized and denied the same levels of access as their compatriots, these communities remain largely excluded from development planning and policy. Social and economic inequity across the state is clearly differentiated in access, availability and affordability of services related to water and sanitation.

This leaves women and girls from tribal communities disproportionately affected by poor access to WASH facilities and subject to the insecurity and indignity of open defecation.

The tribal district of Alirajpur was equipped with effective delivery mechanisms and WASH services that bridged these inequities. Following the launch of the nationwide Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) in 2014, the district made remarkable progress, sanitation coverage jumped from 27% in 2014 to 50% in 2016/17 and Alirajpur was declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) in March 2018.

### KEY POINTS

- Alirajpur formed a District Core Committee as a step towards achieving effective coordination and convergence across all relevant departments. A block level core group comprising teachers, *aanganwadi* workers, Gram Panchayats and ASHAs was formed to promote the message of safe sanitation.
- Regular monitoring fostered participation, learning and flexibility, by recognizing the role of local communities in planning and managing environmental sanitation. This gave communities the opportunity to learn from their own change.
- Promoting the use of existing structures and building the capacity of administrations enhanced the scaling up of community participation for ODF attainment and sustainability.
- The accountability of functionaries and front line workers to internalize ODF as a social norm in tribal communities and ensuring accessibility of services in remote areas was an important example of responsive governance.
- Madhya Pradesh's rural sanitation coverage witnessed an increase of 57% in three years after the launch of SBM.

## Key Information

- Geographical diversity, regional disparity, hard to reach areas, natural disasters and the high rate of migration were some of the challenges faced in reaching out to excluded communities.
- Applying conventional Community Approaches to Sanitation (CAS) tools was hindered by the inaccessible terrain in which villages were located, making community mobilization a particular challenge.
- Large distances between villages over a wide geographic area made the timely supply of sanitary ware and the effective management of the supply chain a further challenge.

cleaning toilets, such as using stones instead of water.

Madhya Pradesh has made great strides in improving rural sanitation coverage under the national flagship programme. As a part of the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), the state launched *Maryada Abhiyan* (dignity) that focused on dignity attached to sanitation. The campaign aimed at supporting villages in eliminating open defecation by recognizing the key role that women played in catalysing improvements in sanitation and hygiene behaviour. This approach doubled rural sanitation coverage, rising from 14.8% in April 2012 to 27% by October 2014.

Equity and inclusion were the cornerstones of the approach. This saw people from isolated

## Alirajpur: a proving ground for ODF in tribal regions

100%



- Despite being a remote, hard to reach district, all households in Alirajpur have access to a toilet and 88.5% of these are environmentally friendly leach pit toilets.
- 17 of the 19 *aanganwadis* (child care centres) have a toilet.
- 8 of 17 schools have separate toilets for boys and girls. No schools have reported a case of OD.
- All school children and women in *aanganwadis* are aware of good sanitation practices.
- 96% of toilets are functional and 93% of villages have sustained ODF status.
- 64% of households dispose of child faecal waste safely in the toilet.

- The combination of the outlined challenges created a number of unique obstacles in developing a cadre of committed workers and trainers for continuous advocacy, communication, monitoring and surveillance.
- There was limited awareness on healthy sanitation practices amongst communities steeped in traditional techniques for

and marginalized communities, among them the tribal communities of Alirajpur, brought in to the mainstream and afforded access to sanitation.

- The SBM aimed to create ODF communities by ensuring easy access and use of toilets through collective behaviour

change. These CAS tools encompassed service delivery approaches to eliminating open defecation.

- Equitable sharing of responsibilities between government functionaries and frontline workers was one of the unique features of SBM in Alirajpur's Community Approaches for Total Sanitation (CATS), aimed to achieve ODF communities by promoting the use of safe, affordable and user-friendly solutions. Its emphasis on community leadership and participation allowed tribal communities to take control of the change process and use their capacity to attain the envisioned objectives.

## Conclusion

- Social and behaviour change communication in tribal area requires inclusive and equitable approaches, especially effective and continuous engagement with social leaders throughout the programme cycle.
- Equity-focused community approaches to sanitation need to be contextualized to address sanitation exclusion arising from geography, excluded groups, gender, norms and poverty.
- Effective and efficient leadership relies on continuously learning and implementing socially acceptable approaches that help shape convergent planning, effective participation of all key stakeholders, and peoples and to ensure service delivery in hard to reach areas.
- Positive behaviour change requires a long-term, people-centric approach to successfully influence social norms related to hygiene practices.
- Engagement of sanitation 'foot soldiers' (*swachhagrahis*) is necessary in order to

address the unmet needs of hygiene promotion and ODF sustainability issues.

- Upgrading of WASH in institutions is vital, including operation and maintenance systems in schools, child care (*aanganwadi*) centres and healthcare facilities.
- Emphasis should be placed on rolling out plans for retrofitting and improving climate resilient WASH services and functional institutional systems for ODF+ initiatives, including solid and liquid waste management, WASH nutrition interventions, and menstrual hygiene management.

## References

IIM. (2018). *Rural Immersion Program in Madhya Pradesh-Sanitation Practices and ODF Validation*. IIM and UNICEF Madhya Pradesh.

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