

Draft Note on-CFAR Partnering with Transgender Leaders and Community-based Organization 'Sakha' (meaning comrade) to Place Transgender at the Centre of WASH Inclusive Program of Government of Odisha, India (this is part of the system strengthening effort that the WfW Project has contributed to-*Strengthened WASH sector systems with greater emphasis on gender and social inclusion and safely managed WASH*)

Background

Odisha is counted as one of the states with a higher transgender population. According to the Socio Economic and Caste Census (2011) in Odisha, there are 4316 transgender households in rural areas and 463 transgender persons in urban areas. This is a serious under-count. Overall, it is estimated that 5.75 per cent of the transgender households of rural India are in Odisha and 1.5 per cent of the urban transgender population in the country is in Odisha. In Bhubaneswar there are approximately 600 transgender and of these, CFAR, has thus far registered 164 transgender persons seeking improvement in WASH services and access to related social entitlements

The Government released Odisha Transgender Policy, 2017. From 2016, many efforts were made by the government with the support of community-based organizations of transgender and CSOs to reach out social entitlements and services to the transgender. However, in the urban context and more specifically on the issue of 'WASH', this was not easy to do. It took a more concrete shape and form after the roll-out of the Water for Women Fund, DFAT project implemented by Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR) with the support of Research Triangle Institute (RTI) to strengthen private sector engagement

What worked?

In 2018, CFAR forged partnership with 'Sakha', an Odisha-based transgender community-based organization led by Mx. Meera Parida and a lead transgender social activist called Mx. Meghna Sahoo. The main aim of the partnership has been to evolve transgender-led inclusive WASH programming

Steps taken

Evidence-strengthening: Sakha and CFAR conducted a rapid assessment to identify extent of exclusion/inclusion from basic services and social entitlements faced by transgender persons. We found a majority not having access to household water connection and many had not secured the basic 'citizenship' card called Aadhar or Unique Identification Number. This made them ineligible for a majority of services and schemes

Secured backing from the Nodal Institution or Department: In March 2018, to redress the situation, CFAR and Sakha with the support of the Principal Secretary (Head) of the Nodal Department (Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities), set up a mechanism called Single Window which was named as *Paribartan* (transformation). The Single Window was managed entirely by transgender volunteers. While explaining, what the Single Window is and why they needed it, Mx. Meera Parida said that "often service centres who are contracted to register online people for various services and programmes are not dealing sensitively with problems of transgender, physically challenged and of senior citizen and we, therefore devised this Single Window System or a service centre to ensure that we service our group of transgender persons," she added.

Shaped social inclusion: The Single Window worked in many ways; of the 133 applications they submitted to the government seeking sanction of different social entitlements, they got positive response on 42 applications within one month and this kept steadily growing. Nearly 22 transgender got the Unique Identification Number and 13 transgender got household water connection and more recently many got the Transgender Identity Certificate.

From securing social entitlements to advocating for inclusive WASH: The success they experienced fuelled their aspirations. Now the Sakha members want the government to do whatever it takes to advance and bring to fruition the process of both mainstreaming the issues faced by transgender and recognizing their unique needs and expectations. In the space of WASH, they insisted that the principle that “one size does not fit all” and respect for diversity has to be recognized and affirmed in words and deed.

Turning point: On World Toilet Day, 2018, in the presence of WASH system heads and policy makers, Mx. Ayesha Rout, transgender representative said that, “Transgender persons are not thought of when government or anyone talks about toilets. If you do not include us, how can you be inclusive?” Mx. Meera Parida made it clear to the government that their effort to create a Smart City will not succeed if it is not LGBTQI –friendly. She urged the government to construct public toilets for transgender starting from government offices, malls, bus-stands, railway stations, hospitals, schools and colleges. They administered a pledge exhorting everyone not to rest till WASH becomes truly inclusive and universal.

The top officials of Department of Urban Development and Housing associated with a programme titled *Jaga Mission or Transforming Slums into Liveable Habitats* who were present at the event became acutely conscious of their ‘neglect’ or lack of understanding of issues affecting transgender and in ‘missing’ out the transgender persons while trying to make slums liveable. Speaking about this Mr. Sisir Dash, Head, Jaga Mission admitted candidly that but for Sakha and CFAR, the Mission and the Government would not have been sensitized about transgender issues.

Integration of transgender in urban planning: Thereafter the Mission directed its team doing community assessment to focus on inclusion of vulnerable groups such as transgender (meeting minutes, 11 July, 2019). In consultation with CFAR they appointed Mx. Meghna Sahoo as Fellow, Jaga Mission and with the support CFAR began to systematically reach out to transgender and document/record their concerns around WASH and livelihood. However societal attitudes continued to be discriminatory

Online campaign for inclusive toilets: To address the societal attitude, on the eve of the World Toilet Day, 2019, Meghana Sahoo initiated an online campaign for inclusive toilet. She took her petition to Change.Org and garnered over 20,000 signatures for the cause.

The main question posed by the campaign was: As Citizen of this Country do we not deserve access to public toilets?

The Campaign statement highlighted the multiple challenges they face due to the stigma and discrimination they experience in their daily lives

They pointed out that:

They have to put up with the double-standards of mainstream society

Don’t dare to travel far from their residence as they don’t have access to public toilets.

If they dare to use public toilets they are humiliated time and again

The lack of dignified access to toilets and the treatment meted out to them affects them in ways which many cannot even imagine, let alone face it

Loss of daily earnings, as they cannot go very far from their homes due to inability to access toilets

And not able to perform their duties efficiently

Call for Action: Made an appeal to all institutions –government, private, academic, commercial-to adopt signage to make all community, public and institutional toilets universal and trans-friendly.

Urged everyone to join the campaign to ensure that

Trans-persons-inclusive signage is displayed at all toilets

Asked authorities and managers to issue an Office or Work Order or Notice making display of the transgender signage on the doors/ walls of toilets mandatory

Many heads of government department including Principal Secretary, Department of Housing and Urban Development promised to extend support to making all public toilets trans-person friendly and inclusive

Post-COVID context: In the wake of the pandemic and the subsequent loss of livelihood faced by many workers in the informal settlement in particular transgender and women, the government began the process of strengthening urban livelihood initiative. The focus has been on ensuring that the urban poor in particular women, transgender and sanitary workers improve their skills and leverage the many income generating and micro-enterprise development opportunities that is being generated by modernizing the solid and liquid waste management. Today the transgender have formed self-help groups and are being contracted to recycle waste and collect parking fee from all vehicle owners.

Scaling up the intervention: To conclude the CFAR-Sakha journey, which began in February 2018, with the aim of empowering transgender to secure WASH services and other social entitlements including livelihood, has been recognized by the government as a model that can be replicated across Odisha. CFAR and Sakha have been mandated by the government to take the learning from Bhubaneswar to 13 districts of Odisha