

## Learning Outcomes

Role of Mahila Arogya Samitis (MAS) to address urban sanitation challenges in Bhadrak, Odisha

July 2018



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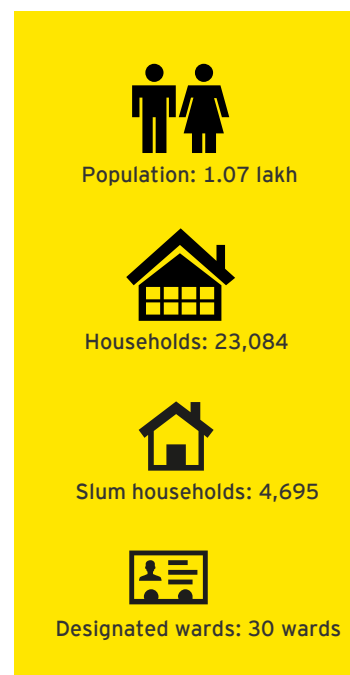
# 1. Introduction

A collaborative approach to citizen engagement is key to facilitate successful behavior change to motivate households to adopt good sanitation practices. In cases where the target population are urban slum communities, a predominant characteristic is the low socioeconomic status (income, literacy rate). Enabling a behavior change amongst the urban slum community necessitates a localized approach that is both effective and sustainable in the long run. One such approach is the local community engagement aided by grassroots level Community based Organizations (CBOs). Such interventions helps to address systemic local challenges to achieve long term socioeconomic outcomes amongst the target population. In that regard, Bhadrak town has taken a step in the right direction by leveraging existing ward level CBOs to address sanitation issues particularly on Fecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM). This note intends to document the Bhadrak Municipality efforts to capacitate and leverage skills of Mahila Arogya Samitis (MAS) women groups to promote desirable sanitation and FSSM practices at the ward level.

## 2. The sanitation challenge

Bhadrak town is constituted of 43 urban slums with 20% of the population residing in the slums. Figure 1 is representative of the demographic profile of Bhadrak district. The uniqueness of the urban slum population is the relatively equal proportion of Hindu and Muslim population. Bhadrak is yet to attain Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and the prevalent urban sanitation challenges are:

- ▶ Practice of Open Defecation (OD), which is currently estimated to be 37%. The practice is predominant in urban slum communities and is attributed to the unaware slum households on the negative health implications of such practices. In some cases, absence of land ownership by members of the households to construct individual/shared sanitation facilities is also cited as a reason towards defecating in the open.
- ▶ Slum Households unaware on the importance of safe and scientific containment systems like standardized septic tank/pits. This is evident from the presence of toilet outlets connected to the open drains.
- ▶ Slum Households apathetic on sanitation service delivery services offered by the municipality such as cesspool services for emptying containment systems.



The implications of such sanitation challenges are witnessed by the presence of polluted open drains, water bodies and incidences of water borne diseases such as jaundice, diarrhea and typhoid affecting women and children.

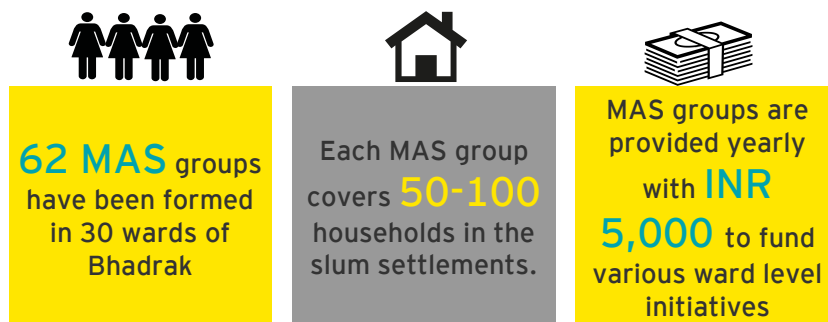
In order to address grassroots level sanitation challenges in the slums, Bhadrak municipality has motivated Mahila Arogya Samitis (MAS) a local women collectible to address sanitation challenges.

## 2. Mahila Arogya Samitis (MAS)

MAS groups in Bhadrak were formed in 2014 as mandated by the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM) with an intent to promote community participation to improve public health, nutrition and



sanitation outcomes. The MAS groups take collective action to address issues at the slum level and each MAS groups consist of 11-15 women with an elected Chairman, Secretary and a treasurer. One MAS group covers 50-100 households in slum and slum like settlements in a ward. NUHM also provides every MAS group with a yearly lump sum of INR 5000 to fund various activities. The women are designated as ward level frontal units and act as a liaison between the municipality and households. Figure 2 is a representation of the current MAS profile in Bhadrak.



The MAS groups are formally trained on health, hygiene, water and sanitation topics under NUHM. As trained members, the women demonstrate proficiency in understanding the inter-interlinkages between health and sanitation to achieve desired social outcomes. The MAS members also monitor, track and report local progress as a result of the interventions.

## 2.1. Responsibilities of MAS groups in Bhadrak

Specific to sanitation, the MAS groups implement activities to progress in attaining ward level ODF and to promote good FSSM practices. To support activities, the municipality also facilitates community mobilization programs like MAS orientation programs to orient groups on the importance of sanitation, the impact of poor sanitation on wellbeing and appropriate FSSM practices. Detailed below are the current areas of focus to improve sanitation outcomes.

### 2.1.1. Reducing Open Defecation

The MAS women ensure that the community members do not practice open defecation by generating awareness on the health benefits of adopting desirable hygiene and sanitation practices. Households are also motivated to construct Individual Household Latrines (IHHL) through the Swachh Bharat Mission by availing the monetary incentives offered by the government. For household's dependant on



shared sanitation facilities, MAS members motivate households to use the facilities and keep the premises clean.

#### MAS OD champion



Fatima is the President of the MAS group in ward number 11 of Bhadrak. She is leading by example by demonstrating the ability to successfully mobilize communities by breaking religious indifferences between the members of the MAS groups to bring about positive sanitation outcomes in the ward. She and her group is proud of a clean ODF ward with households more aware on good sanitation and FSSM practices. She has been instrumental in achieving harmony among members to take collective investment decisions. Use of the INR 5,000 lump sum to procure dustbins to be located in strategic locations in the ward is one such example. Collective responsibilities promoted by Fatima and her group have gathered the recognition of municipality officials, which has given her the opportunity to get additional training on hygiene and sanitation. This has resulted in shared learning, bridging knowledge gaps, fostering innovation and increasing accountability among the members of the MAS groups. Positive on-ground impacts have also left the MAS members even more motivated to undertake bigger activities that result in larger impacts.

### 2.1.2. Promoting better Fecal Sludge and Septage Management

Bhadrak is one of the designated 9 towns in Odisha under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT). Initiatives to improve sewage and septage management practices through FSSM are currently underway in the municipality. To increase the visibility of the importance of FSSM, MAS women are also oriented on FSSM. Current training lessons encompass key FSSM value chain components such as the importance of safe containment, best practices on emptying, transportation and treatment of waste. MAS groups engage households and individuals to improve FSSM cognizance on:

1. Significance of constructing on-site sanitation systems
2. Availing municipality services such as cesspool services for emptying the contained waste and desirable practices to follow on frequency of emptying and waste disposal

#### MAS OD champion

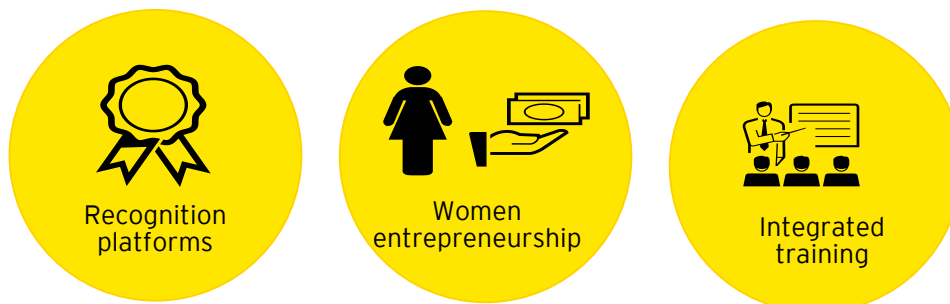


Drupati Puhana is the Secretary of the MAS group in ward number 30. A self-starter by nature, she has put in efforts to individually motivate households to avail cesspool services for emptying of contained waste. She has also come forward in availing cesspool services on behalf of the households. Her efforts have also led to an increased demand for cesspool services in the municipality. She has demonstrated the desired qualities to be a successful change agent in the ward. Her efforts to monitor household behaviour and be aware of the municipal services have resulted in positive outcomes. She has also taken the lead to nudge other members of the MAS group to carry out such targeted interventions in the wards. With an entrepreneurial mind-set and interest to work in sanitation, she aspires to build sustainable sanitation enterprise by generating a sustained source of revenue. Individual efforts by such MAS women have left households and communities more aware on the best practices to safely contain, empty and transport waste.

## 3. Recommendations

In Bhadrak, the municipality recognizes MAS women as pioneers in facilitating change at the ward level to improve social outcomes. Additionally, MAS women demonstrate confidence, decision-making, and leadership, which displays signs of women empowerment thus improving gender outcomes. To complement the successes, detailed below are three recommendations are derived as

learning outcomes from interactions with MAS groups of diverse economic and religious backgrounds.



► **Building platforms for recognition**

In Bhadrak, the MAS women champion in driving community engagement at the ward level and facilitate behavior change to practice good sanitation practices. They are viewed as leaders of the



community with substantial familiarity on health and sanitation when compared to other community members. The MAS women recognize the importance of their role in the community and consistently take measures to implement, track and monitor the outcomes. To recognize the work done by the women, additional efforts can be initiated by the municipality to felicitate MAS champions. Events for recognition, performance incentives to champion groups (monetary

and non-monetary), additional trainings etc. are few ways to showcase MAS champions and the work done to a larger audience. Such initiatives empower women further and motivate the groups to continue doing the good work in the community. Such platforms will also create opportunities for all MAS groups to convene, share ideas and experiences thereby fostering innovation and generating shared values.

► **Promoting women entrepreneurship**

Currently, most women of the MAS groups are dependent members of the family without a self-generating sustainable source of income. However, women are enterprising in nature with interest in becoming working towards generating a revenue source at an individual and a group level. Devoid of opportunities to do so, municipality driven efforts to identify or adopt successful case studies of women in sanitation business can be undertaken. Such examples include women led business opportunities for operation and maintenance of community toilets, constructing mini toilets and managing cesspool business. For this to materialize, municipality efforts to create an enabling environment by providing finances, training and government support is also vital. Increasing opportunities for women also ensures greater collaboration for innovation to maximize impacts on

the ground. Finally, such opportunities will imbibe a sense of financial security in the women, which will foster gender empowerment in sanitation.

► **Integrated formal training programs**

Municipality led investments are underway on infrastructure, service delivery and communication to holistically improve FSSM outcomes. To improve community cognizance on FSSM, the municipality has incorporated sensitization programs for the MAS groups on FSSM. For such knowledge transfer programs to be sustainable, municipality led measures to formally launch and conduct and monitor the ground impacts of the FSSM training programs on an ongoing basis is a step further to mainstream FSSM activities alongside keeping a tab on sustainability.



## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, outcomes of empowering ward level CBOs such as the MAS groups are evident from improved sanitation and gender outcomes such as expansion of access to safe sanitation and sanitation service delivery at the ward level. Understanding women centric sanitation challenges have also been achieved to move the envelope of gender inclusiveness in sanitation. Identifying and inculcating best practices to further empower MAS groups will help Bhadrak become pioneers in moving forward the envelope on empowering local women in sanitation.



# Our offices

## Ahmedabad

2nd floor, Shivalik Ishaan  
Near. C.N Vidhyalaya  
Ambawadi  
Ahmedabad - 380 015  
Tel: +91 79 6608 3800  
Fax: +91 79 6608 3900

## Bengaluru

12th & 13th floor  
"U B City" Canberra Block  
No.24, Vittal Mallya Road  
Bengaluru - 560 001  
Tel: +91 80 4027 5000  
+91 80 6727 5000  
Fax: +91 80 2210 6000 (12th floor)  
Fax: +91 80 2224 0695 (13th floor)

Ground Floor, 'A' wing  
Divyasree Chambers  
# 11, O'Shaughnessy Road  
Langford Gardens  
Bengaluru - 560 025  
Tel: +91 80 6727 5000  
Fax: +91 80 2222 9914

## Chandigarh

1st Floor  
SCO: 166-167  
Sector 9-C, Madhya Marg  
Chandigarh - 160 009  
Tel: +91 172 671 7800  
Fax: +91 172 671 7888

## Chennai

Tidel Park  
6th & 7th Floor

## Hyderabad

Oval Office  
18, iLabs Centre  
Hitech City, Madhapur  
Hyderabad - 500 081  
Tel: +91 40 6736 2000  
Fax: +91 40 6736 2200

## Jamshedpur

1st Floor,  
Shantiniketan Building  
Holding No. 1, SB Shop Area  
Bistupur, Jamshedpur - 831 001  
Tel: + 91 657 663 1000

## Kochi

9th Floor "ABAD Nucleus"  
NH-49, Maradu PO  
Kochi - 682 304  
Tel: +91 484 304 4000  
Fax: +91 484 270 5393

## Kolkata

22, Camac Street  
3rd Floor, Block C"  
Kolkata - 700 016  
Tel: +91 33 6615 4400  
Fax: +91 33 6615 3750

## Mumbai

14th Floor, The Ruby  
29 Senapati Bapat Marg  
Dadar (west)  
Mumbai - 400 033  
Tel: +91 22 6192 0000  
Fax: +91 22 6192 1000





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