

Podcast transcripts - Roles & Responsibilities for elected representatives in the state of Odisha

UNICEF, IRC, State Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj

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English

Tikki Mausi: Namaste, Sarojini. How are you? Have you settled in your role as a Sarpanch?

Sarojini: Namaste, Tikki mausi. I am doing well. Learning something new every day.

Tikki Mausi: Great. That is the only way ahead.

Sarojini: Mausi I wanted to ask... why are water and sanitation important for us to consider?

Tikki Mausi: Good question, Sarojini.

Access to safe drinking water is a fundamental requirement for human existence, it also a right of each citizen in our country. Access to safe drinking water and safe sanitation are vital for family well-being. It has a major role in improving public health, that is preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health. Safe drinking water also prevents financial costs associated with ill health such as expenditures made on medical treatment and income/ productivity loss.

Every household needs water for number of purposes like drinking, cooking, washing of utensils, cleaning of the house, bathing, washing of clothes, personal sanitation, for household animals and watering plants around the house, etc. Availability of water in household premises results into saving time of the people, especially for women and girls. It reduces girls dropping out of school. Additionally, it makes quality time available for women and girls to pursue education, livelihood opportunities, and pursue other interests as well as hobbies.

Similarly, availability of safe sanitation facilities has a direct influence on improvement in health and economic gains, environmental cleanliness, and personal dignity.

The access to safe and adequate water and sanitation facilities on sustainable basis to every family has many positive impacts. It reduces death in small children, especially those below 5 who are most vulnerable to chronic diseases like diarrhoea which spread due to unhygienic water and improper sanitation.

Sarojini: What are the water and sanitation related challenges that I should look out for?

Tikki mausi: There are still people in your Gram Panchayat who are left out in terms of access..... There are households without access to a toilet/ latrine and/ or a functional tap within its premises.

Additionally, there are some households that have access to the water and sanitation infrastructure i.e., tap and toilet, respectively, but due to lack of maintenance the same have stopped functioning. Consequently, there is slippage in access to water and/ or sanitation service, such households there is a decrease in level of service – that is the quality, quantity, reliability – and over time these don't work

The community, along with the elected representatives, lack ownership and do not prioritise keeping these services sustainable.

Sarojini: What can I do to address these challenges? What is my role?

Tikki Mausi: As an elected representative of the Gram Panchayat, your first and foremost responsibility is to ensure that everyone in your Gram Panchayat has access to a functional tap connection and a toilet, with safe containment and disposal system, within their household premises, and that wastewater and solid waste is managed in the gram Panchayat.

For this, it is important that you mobilize and engage with ward members and community members to identify the gaps in access to water and sanitation services, understand the reasons for these gaps, and work towards addressing them through the Gram Panchayat Development Plans.

At the same time, you are responsible to ensure that the services are ongoing... the water and sanitation assets, such as the overhead tanks, pipes, and wastewater drains, are functional and well maintained. For this, you must ensure that the complaint redressal mechanism is functional and limited time is taken to respond.

Quality services over time build the confidence of community members on Gram Panchayat leadership. Therefore, it is important that you engage with community members... encourage them to timely register complaints like that of leakage or no supply, such that the period without service is limited; encourage them for regular payment of tariffs to ensure proper operation and maintenance of the assets.

You have a critical role in ensuring that information is provided to the relevant stakeholder. For instance, inform community members about the quality of water available in the Gram Panchayat, based on the water quality tests and how they fare in comparison to the permissible water quality standards. For the complaint redressal mechanism to function properly, you have to ensure that the procedure of the same, with contact information is duly communicated with the community members.

As a Sarpanch you also have to play the important role of coordinating with different stakeholders. For instance, with ward members and Village Water and Sanitation Committee member to obtain information on the ground level situation in terms of access to services, and those left behind. Further, with the Junior Engineers to get support to address the different water and sanitation related challenges in the Gram Panchayat. Finally, with the block office to leverage other programmes for holistic planning for the Gram Panchayat.

Sarojini: Thank you , Mausi. You mentioned that there are some government programmes and schemes that also support in providing access to water and sanitation services to everyone. Can you tell me more about them?

Tikki mausi: Sure, Sarojini. The state and central government have flagship programmes to ensure that each household has access to safe water and sanitation services within their premises.

For water supply, the Jal Jeevan Mission and BASUDHA programmes are aimed to provide a functional household tap connection to every rural household and to institutions like schools, anganwadi centres,

Gram Panchayat buildings, health centres and community shared spaces.

For sanitation, there is the Swachh Bharat Mission. Phase 1 of Swachh Bharat Mission focussed on providing toilet coverage to each household. In the currently ongoing second phase, the focus of this programme is on ensuring that people have and continue to use toilets. Additionally, the second phase focuses on improving the levels of cleanliness in rural areas through solid and liquid waste management.

Further, the 15th finance commission, has specifically advised 60% of the funds received by Gram Panchayats to be used for water supply and sanitation services.

Sarojini: Are there other programmes that we may use to improve water and sanitation situation in our Gram Panchayat?

Tikki Mausi: When we think of planning for a Ward or Gram Panchayat or Block or District, we are to consider access to basic services like water and sanitation as well as the other elements that influence the availability and safety of these services. For instance, shortage of ground or surface water can impede water supply, solid and liquid waste can contaminate the quality of water source and consequently the water supplied, and so may cause diseases.

For this, as a Sarpanch, with other relevant stakeholders like ward members, Village Water and Sanitation Committee members, you need to consider the panchayat holistically – understand its the needs/gaps, the reasons or the root cause of the gaps, identify activities to address the gaps, plan and budget for these and monitor the same. Often, it is difficult to accommodate all these activities within one programme or funding source. Therefore, to implement or finance water and sanitation activities, other allied programmes like MGNREGA need to be explored, with the Block Development Officer.

Sarojini: Thank you for all this information, Mausi.

Tikki mausi: Remember for a village to develop, prosper and thrive, we have to ensure the health and wellbeing of all,. Safe water, sanitation and overall cleanliness play a key role in this...

Make sure that no one is left behind, as health impacts will not be reached if even one household has unsafe water or sanitation.

We must remember that we need safe water and sanitation for life. Hence, you as an elected representative, need to continue paying attention to these basic services.... plan, budget, monitor to ensure that everyone has sustainable access to these services.

A healthy village is a happy and prosperous village!

English

Tikki Mausi: Namaste, Kanhu. How are you?

Kanhu: Namaste, Tikki mausi. It is wonderful to see you today as I have been waiting to ask you something since a few days.

Tikki Mausi: Sure, please ask.

Kanhu: Why are water and sanitation important for us to consider?

Tikki Mausi: Good question, Kanhu.

Access to safe drinking water is a fundamental requirement for human existence, it also a right of each citizen in our country. Access to safe drinking water and safe sanitation are vital for family well-being. It has a major role in improving public health, that is preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health. Safe drinking water also prevents financial costs associated with ill health such as expenditures made on medical treatment and income/ productivity loss.

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Similarly, availability of safe sanitation facilities has a direct influence on improvement in health and economic gains, environmental cleanliness, and personal dignity.

The access to safe and adequate water and sanitation facilities on sustainable basis to every family has many positive impacts. It reduces death in small children, especially those below 5 who are most vulnerable to chronic diseases like diarrhoea which spread due to unhygienic water and improper sanitation.

Kanhu: What are the water and sanitation related challenges that I should look out for?

Tikki mausi: There are still people in your ward who are left out in terms of access..... There are households without access to a toilet/ latrine and/ or a functional tap within its premises.

Additionally, there are some households that have access to the water and sanitation infrastructure i.e., tap and toilet, respectively, but due to lack of maintenance the same have stopped functioning. Consequently, there is slippage in access to water and/ or sanitation service, such households there is a decrease in level of service – that is the quality, quantity, reliability – and over time these don't work

The community, along with the elected representatives, lack ownership and do not prioritise keeping these services sustainable.

Kanhu: What can I do to address these challenges? What is my role?

Tikki Mausi: As a ward member your first and foremost responsibility is to ensure that everyone in your ward has access to a functional tap connection and a toilet, with safe containment and disposal system, within their household premises, and that wastewater and solid waste is managed in the ward.

For this, you have to regularly engage with the households in your ward, through visits or Palli Sabha, to understand their situation/challenges in terms of access to safe water and sanitation services, and relevantly escalate these to the Sarpanch.

You have to ensure regular testing of water quality in the ward and then share the test report with all the households in a way that they are able to understand the same.

You have to ensure that the water and sanitation assets of the ward, such as the overhead tanks, pipes, and wastewater drains are functional and well maintained. For this, it is important to collect tariffs regularly. As a representative of the community, your role is to encourage them to pay tariffs on a regular basis. You have to collect the monthly tariffs from every household in your ward and ensure that the account books are well maintained and publicly available for transparency.

In case a household is unable to pay due to its economic situation, your role is to share this information with the sarpanch, on a timely basis, with a request to reduce or waive off tariff, as per the situation.

To build confidence of the households on the quality of the service you must ensure that the complaint redressal mechanism for the services is functional.

With your knowledge of the situation of access to water and sanitation services in your ward, you are in a good position to influence the Gram Panchayat annual plans (GPDP) and budgets to include –

1. households or public institutions without access to water and/ or sanitation service.
2. regular and preventive maintenance of water and sanitation assets

Kanhu: Thank you , Mausi. You mentioned that there are some government programmes and schemes that also support in providing access to water and sanitation services to everyone. Can you tell me more about them?

Tikki mausi: Sure, Kanhu. The state and central government have flagship programmes to ensure that each household has access to safe water and sanitation services within their premises.

For water supply, the Jal Jeevan Mission and BASUDHA programmes are aimed to provide a functional household tap connection to every rural household and to institutions like schools, anganwadi centres, Gram Panchayat buildings, health centres and community shared spaces.

For sanitation, there is the Swachh Bharat Mission. Phase 1 of Swachh Bharat Mission focussed on providing toilet coverage to each household. In the currently ongoing second phase, the focus of this programme is on ensuring that people have and continue to use toilets. Additionally, the second phase focuses on improving the levels of cleanliness in rural areas through solid and liquid waste management.

Further, the 15th finance commission, has specifically advised 60% of the funds received by Gram Panchayats to be used for water supply and sanitation services.

Kanhu: Are there other programmes that we may use to improve water and sanitation situation in our ward?

Tikki Mausi: When we think of planning for a Ward or Gram Panchayat or Block or District, we are to consider access to basic services like water and sanitation as well as the other elements that influence the availability and safety of these services. For instance, shortage of ground or surface water can impede water supply, solid and liquid waste can contaminate the quality of water source and consequently the water supplied, and so may cause diseases.

For this, a ward member, with other panchayat members, like the Sarpanch, Village Water and Sanitation Committee members, and other relevant stakeholders, need to consider the panchayat holistically – understand its the needs/gaps, the reasons or the root cause of the gaps, identify activities to address the gaps, plan and budget for these and monitor the same. Often, it is difficult to accommodate all these activities within one programme or funding source. Therefore, to implement or finance water and sanitation activities, other allied programmes like MGNREGA need to be explored, with the Sarpanch and the Block Development Officer.

Kanhu: Thank you for all this information, Mausi.

Tikki mausi: Remember for a village to develop, prosper and thrive, we have to ensure the health and wellbeing of all. Safe water, sanitation and overall cleanliness play a key role in this...

Make sure that no one is left behind, as health impacts will not be reached if even one household has unsafe water or sanitation.

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English

Tikki Mausi: Namaste, Binayak. How are you?

Binayak: Namaste, Tikki mausi. It is wonderful to see you today as I have been waiting to ask you something since a few days.

Tikki Mausi: Sure, please ask.

Binayak: Why are water and sanitation important for us to consider?

Tikki Mausi: Good question, Binayak.

Access to safe drinking water is a fundamental requirement for human existence, it also a right of each citizen in our country. Access to safe drinking water and safe sanitation are vital for family well-being. It has a major role in improving public health, that is preventing disease, prolonging life, and promoting health. Safe drinking water also prevents financial costs associated with ill health such as expenditures made on medical treatment and income/ productivity loss.

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Binayak: What are the water and sanitation related challenges that I should look out for?

Tikki mausi: There are still people in your Block or District who are left out in terms of access..... There are households without access to a toilet/ latrine and/ or a functional tap within its premises.

Additionally, there are some households that have access to the water and sanitation infrastructure i.e., tap and toilet, respectively, but due to lack of maintenance the same have stopped functioning. Consequently, there is slippage in access to water and/ or sanitation service, such households there is a decrease in level of service – that is the quality, quantity, reliability – and over time these don't work

The community, along with the elected representatives, lack ownership and do not prioritise keeping these services sustainable.

Binayak: What can I do to address these challenges? What is my role?

Tikki Mausi: Panchayat samiti and Zila parishad members play an important role in supporting Gram Panchayats in providing access to water supply and sanitation services to all.

It is your responsibility to ensure that all Gram Panchayats leaders understand the importance of safe water, sanitation, and hygiene, and are aware of the programmes and provisions to provide these services.

As Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad members, you should have an idea of the coverage situation in terms of water and sanitation services in your constituency: identify households/ institutions left out of coverage, or in need of retrofitting.

For this, it is important to ensure that Village Water Sanitation Committees (VWSCs) are functional in the Gram Panchayats in your constituency. And, the VWSCs are providing the necessary information and support for Gram Panchayat planning, budgeting, and monitoring of the water and sanitation services.

A key step towards providing water and sanitation services is to ensure that maximum Gram Panchayats in your constituency are eligible for the existing government programmes and schemes. For instance, to be eligible for Jal Jeevan Mission, specifically, you have to work with Gram Panchayats to identify a sustainable water source to provide adequate water for all seasons, get their agreement on provision of land for the scheme, provide the Operation & Maintenance costs for the first year, ensure participation of community members along with other relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes.

For improved hygiene in your constituency, you must get involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of management of waste, both solid and liquid.

Overall, you play a critical role in supporting the Gram Panchayat in providing sustainable and safe water and sanitation services. Towards this, you must ensure that there is regular tariff collection to keep the water and sanitation assets, such as overhead tanks, pipes, and wastewater drains, functional. Further, ensure that the complaint redressal mechanism is functional and the households are aware and use the same. Additionally, ensure that the Gram Panchayat is able to use the 15th Finance Commission funds appropriately; and, if required, suggest other programmes or schemes that can be utilized towards provision of water and sanitation services.

Above all, you must make sure that the relevant information and education with respect to water, sanitation and hygiene are communicated in ways that is understood by the different stakeholders in the communities.

Binayak: Thank you, Mausi. You mentioned that there are some government programmes and schemes that also support in providing access to water and sanitation services to everyone. Can you tell me more about them?

Tikki mausi: Sure, Binayak. The state and central government have flagship programmes to ensure that

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Further, the 15th finance commission, has specifically advised 60% of the funds received by Gram Panchayats to be used for water supply and sanitation services.

Binayak: Are there other programmes that can be used to improve water and sanitation situation?

Tikki Mausi: When we think of planning for a Ward or Gram Panchayat or Block or District, we are to consider access to basic services like water and sanitation as well as the other elements that influence the availability and safety of these services. For instance, shortage of ground or surface water can impede water supply, solid and liquid waste can contaminate the quality of water source and consequently the water supplied, and so may cause diseases.

For this, as Panchayat Samiti or Zilla Parishad members, with other relevant stakeholders like ward members, Village Water and Sanitation Committee members, you need to view each Gram Panchayat holistically – understand their needs/gaps, the reasons or the root cause of the gaps, identify activities to address the gaps, plan and budget for these and monitor the same. Often, it is difficult to accommodate all these activities within one programme or funding source. Therefore, to implement or finance water and sanitation activities, other allied programmes like MGNREGA need to be explored, with the Sarpanch, the Block Development Officer, and if required the District Magistrate.

Binayak: Thank you for all this information, Mausi.

Tikki mausi: Remember for a village to develop, prosper and thrive, we have to ensure the health and wellbeing of all. Safe water, sanitation and overall cleanliness play a key role in this...

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