SaciWATERs
SOUTH ASIA CONSORTIUM FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY WATER RESOURCES STUDIES

Arsenic
Knowledge and Action Network

Brief report on the meeting held on

People Centric District Platform

Organized by

SaciWATERs

In collaboration with

Joint Director of Health Services, Nalbari

Supported by

European Union

Venue: AMSA House, Nalbari

Date: 24th December, 2018

Background of the work:

Arsenic contamination in drinking water has become a serious and widespread global public health problem. According to the government of India the permissible level of Arsenic in drinking water is 10 ppb. The water resources ministry in response to a question in the Lok Sabha reveal that 65% of Assam's population, or about 21 million people, are drinking arsenic contaminated water, while it's 60% in Bihar and 44% in West Bengal. [1] SaciWATERs has been instrumental in building The Arsenic Knowledge and Action Network (AKAN), which since 2013, has been engaged at multiple levels through partnerships and collaborations for addressing the issues of arsenic contamination in water and related health issues in Assam and more recently through platforms like Safe Water Centre for Healthy Assam (SWaCHa). SWaCHA in collaboration with Arsenic Knowledge and Action Network & Fluoride Knowledge and Action Network conducted a two day's sensitisation workshop on 'Arsenic in drinking water and it's manifestations on health in 2017 at Nalbari. The district administration, health department, PHED and various CSOs were the part of that initiatives.

Current Initiatives: Enabling access to safe drinking water

In 2018, SaciWATERs, as the Co-Applicant with INREM Foundation, has received support from the European Union for a project titled "**Civil Society voices, vulnerable communities and localized platforms for addressing water quality challenges**" to build people centric district platforms in 4 districts of Bihar (Buxar and Bhagalpur) and Assam (Jorhat and Nalbari) affected with arsenic contamination in water, in order to complement the actions of National Water Quality Sub-Mission. The approach under the EU supported initiative is to build and empower people-centric platforms at the district level by expanding from 10 habitations as pilot to 50 habitations as launch scale to 150 habitations consider as expand scale in each of these four districts which are affected with arsenic to complement the National Water Quality Sub Mission (NWQSM).

As a part of this initiative, establishment of a District level platform is proposed, with the main aim to bridge the gap between community and Government to address the water quality issues/challenges concerning access to safe water. The approach under the EU supported initiative is to build and empower people-centric platforms at the district level by expanding from 10 habitations as "pilot" to 50 habitations as "launch" to 150 habitations as "expand" in each of these four districts which are affected with arsenic to complement the NWQSM. In this approach there would be a step-by-step withdrawal in a cascading effect, first by SaciWATERS and then by local CSO partners and then the district level platform. The following table (Tab.1) and figure (Fig. 1) shows the stakeholders for the proposed district platform and model of the same respectively. The district platform would support to achieve the goals of the project and find a ecologically sustainable and equitable way for addressing the arsenic challenges in drinking water.

[1] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/19-of-indians-drink-water-with-lethal-levels-of-arsenic/articleshow/62226542.cms

Sl. No.	Expected stakeholders for the proposed district platform		
1	District Administration	7	Panchyati Raj Instituition
2	Public Health Engineering Department	8	Social Welfare Department
3	Health Department	9	Education Department
4	Social Welfare Department	10	Media, CSO, Grassroot organisation
5	Agriculture department	11	Key community people, Frontline workers
6	Research and academic institute	12	Market solutions

Tab. 1: Expected Stakeholders for the proposed district platform.

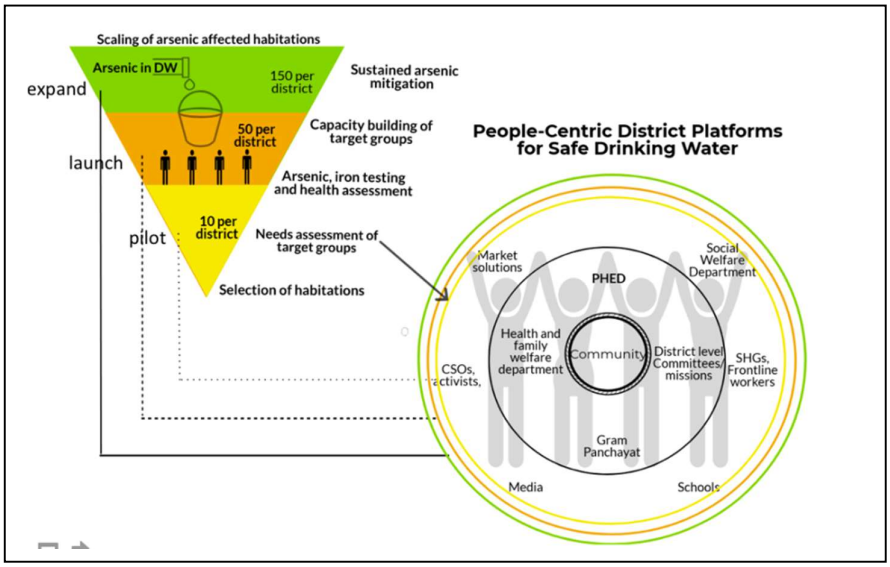

Fig. 1: Approach of the district platform

People Centric District Platform Initiation Meet:

A district level meeting was held on 24th December, 2018 at AMSA house, Nalbari. The meeting brought together all the stakeholders from the Government at District level, Sub-division level, local civil society organisations and frontline community people. The main objective of the meeting was to share about the ongoing initiatives undertaken by SaciWATERs under the project supported by European Union and initiate the people centric district platform, which is one the main objectives of the project.

The day began with a round of introduction of the participants followed by a presentation about the current initiatives for addressing the arsenic issues delivered by Churamoni Saikia, Research Associate, SaciWATERs. The presentation highlighted about SaciWATERs, thematic areas and presence of works, objectives, expected outcomes, strategy of people centric district platforms and linkages with government programmes/mission on safe

water/health followed by a session about the arsenic issues in Nalbari district, it's mitigation measures and challenges. In this session, it was pointed out that 998 habitations have been affected with arsenic out of 1191 habitations (as of 01/04/2017)[2] and in an average arsenic contamination ranges from 10ppb-200ppb. In a report prepared by PHED Assam, UNICEF and IIT-Guwahati in 2011 stated that in Nalbari 60,825 people have been drinking high level of arsenic contaminated water and which is a serious threaten to their health and future generation. It was also raised that in 2017, SWaCHA conducted a sensitisation workshop on arsenicosis cum health assessment at Kaithalkuchi area, Nalbari district and in the health camp it was suspected 8 person with arenicosis among the 12 randomly screened persons.

The participant stakeholders were asked to share their works and thoughts for addressing the arsenic issues in the district. And in response to that that Sadulla Ali, who is working with 'Arsenic Nilogan' a technology for arsenic removal developed by Tezpur University, shared about people negligence about the low cost solutions. In line with that he stated that 'Arsenic Nilogan' is a simple small scale technology where baking powder, potassium permanganate and ferric chloride used for to remove arsenic in drinking water through oxidation-coagulation-adsorption at optimised pH in batch mode. But due to the lethargic attitude of some of the community people and lack of awareness among people about the risk of drinking arsenic contaminated water, they have been faced lots of challenges for implementing the solution in ground. Sweety Talukdar, IEC consultant, PHED Nalbari stated that for the awareness generation one should always target most influential person of the community or households and street play, wall painting and visual documents would work as a effective tools for communication. Next, one of the stakeholders discussed about the measures to take for irrigation water so that arsenic do not enter in the food chain. Mr. Mantu Sharma, President, Satma water users committee, shared his experiences and challenges of running a water user committee. He added about the people unwillingness to pay the minimum service charges for the water supply regularly and which lead to the financial constraints for maintaining the schemes. Dr. Nalinikanta Barman, Nodal officer, NPPCF-Nalbari said that the health department has been observed increasing trends of cancer in

[2] https://phe.assam.gov.in/information-services/details-of-quality-affected-habitation

Nalbari but due to the lack of expertise about arsenicosis and technical support they couldn't able to define arsenic as the main factors for high incidence and prevalence of cancer.

The next session was about the role of convergence for addressing the public health issues followed by introducing the model of district platform and sharing the immediate plan of action where the district platform would play a crucial role. The session was chaired by Er. A B Paul, Regional Head, INREM Foundation, stated that better understanding of technical, spatial and socio economic challenges by institutional stakeholders and intersectoral coordination among the various government and non government organisation is crucial for sustainable arsenic mitigation. He highlighted the major factor hindering sustainable arsenic mitigation as below:

- Institutional weakness
- Lack of accountability and coordination among between organisations.
- Latency period of As exposure decreased the urgency for action and resource allocation.
- Many deployed arsenic remediation technologies fail because they are not maintained, repaired, accepted, or affordable.
- Lack of public awareness about the arsenic problem.

He also shared about the recent collaboration of WSSO-PHED, Assam and INREM foundation for setting up the Fluoride Mitigation support Centre (FMSC) in four fluoride affected districts in Assam and which would facilitated the role of various government department, CSOs and community people for addressing the fluoride issues. He also added that water users committee could play very significant role for addressing the water quality issues. In the discussion it was shared that the district platform would have scope of enabling the convergence between aforementioned stakeholders (tab.1) and would emphasize on sustainable solutions that are ecologically sound and addressing the most marginalized people.

Group discussion and outcome of the meeting:

The last session was most interesting and significant part of the meeting where all the participants were divided into three groups and asked them to share the next immediate plan of the district platform for addressing the arsenic challenges and which is consider as a good outcome of the meeting.

- Convergence programme in the targeted habitation and village level committee formation including Gram Panchyat, ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers, PHED representatives, school teacher etc. The

village level committee would expect to inform people about the water testing procedures and nearby government laboratory facility for the same.

- Field survey for the situational analysis by the community frontline workers.
- Arsenicosis screen and surveillance program through a structured method.
- Setting up of Arsenic Mitigation Support Centre in the district level where PHED would work as a nodal agency.
- Detection of arsenic contaminated drinking water sources and providing the alternate safe water sources.

Conclusion and vote of thanks:

Ms. Sumanjita Barman, District Coordinator, SaciWATERs offered vote of thanks to all the participants from the government departments, CSOs, PRI, academic institutions and frontline community workers and concluded the proceedings and summarising briefly about the main outcomes from the discussion. The district platform stakeholders would meet at a mutually decided time intervals. The kind support and cooperation extended by Joint Director of Health Services, Nalbari and Assam Medical Service Association, Nalbari was also duly acknowledged.

Annexure 1: Agenda of the day:

AGENDA OF THE DAY

PEOPLE CENTRIC DISTRICT PLATFORM INITIATION MEET

Date: 24th December, 2018 (Monday) Venue: AMSA HOUSE

Time	Session	Speaker
10:00 am-10:45am	Welcome and Registration/ Introductions/ Discussing objective of the meeting	SaciWATERs team
10:45am-11:15am	Introduction to EU project & work so far	SaciWATERs team
11:15 am-11:45 am	Arsenic issues in District, it's mitigation measures and challenges: Listening from stakeholders a. What do we know about arsenic? b. What are the solutions? c. Role of Community	Open for all: Facilitated by SaciWATERs team
11:45am-12:15pm	Role of convergence for addressing public health issues: Sharing some success stories	Er. A B Paul, Former chief engineer, PHED, Assam
12:15 pm-12:30 pm	The District Platform: What's at core?	Open for all facilitated by SaciWATERs team
12:30 pm-01:00 pm	Group discussion: What immediate plan should be taken up, who will responsible and how do we make synergies	Group activity: Facilitated by SaciWATERs team
01:00pm-01:15 pm	Conclusion & Vote of Thanks followed by Group Photo	SaciWATERs team
Lunch		

Annexure 2: List of the participants

Name Of the participants	Organisation/ Designation/Location
Ms. Sarmila Kakoti	INREM Foundation
Ms. Amrita Baruah	INREM Foundation
Er. A B Paul	INREM Foundation
Md. Tamizur Rahman	Pahlanpara
Ms. Sweety Talukdar	PHED, Nalbari
Mrs. Irani Talukdar	ICDS, Madhupur
Mrs. Rita Barman	ASHA, Gamarimuri
Mr. Mantu Sharma	Satma Water Users Committee
Md. Sadulla Ali	Arsenic Nilogan
Mrs. Loni Mahanta	ANM, Pahlanpara
Mr. Dharani dhar Deka	Village Prseident, Kuwarikuchi
Mr. Churamoni Saikia	SaciWATERs
Mr. Dhanjit Deka	Jagara
Ms. Sumanjita Barman	SaciWATERs
Mrs. Namita Haloi	Barnamkhala
Mrs. Padmini Devi	Chatma
Mrs. Munjari Deka	Social Welfare Department
Md. Nurul Haque	Panchyat Member, Guwakuchi
Mrs. Sajina Begum	Guwakuchi
Mr. Surajit Deka	SaciWATERs
Mr. Atikur Jaman	SaciWATERs
Dr. Nalinikanta Barman	Health Department
Mr. Sanjay Das	AROHAN NGO
Mr. Ramesh Barman	Sandheli
Mr. Subhash Barman	PRI Member
Mr. Nava Kumar Barman	Sandheli
Mr. Ramen Rajbongshi	PHED, Nalbari

Annexure 3: List of the selected habitations (for the pilot scale):

District	Block	Panchyat	Village	Habitation	Hab. Code	As concentration (mg/ l)	year	PHED Div.	
Nalbari	BORIGOG BANBHAG	11 NO DEHARKUCHI	CHATMA	SATMA	12	0.05	2016-17	Nalbari Div	
Nalbari	BORIGOG BANBHAG	11 NO DEHARKUCHI	CHATMA	BARNAMKHALA	1	0.02	2016-17	Nalbari Div	
Nalbari	BORIGOG BANBHAG	11 NO DEHARKUCHI	LARMA BATAKUCHI	BATAKUCHI	14	0.02	2016-17	Nalbari Div	
Nalbari	BORIGOG BANBHAG	12 NO DATARA	KUNDAR GAON	KUWARIKUCHI (KURIKUCHI)	11	0.04	2016-17	Nalbari Div	
Nalbari	BORIGOG BANBHAG	12 NO DATARA	GUWAKUCHI	GUWAKUCHI	15	0.03	2016-17	Nalbari Div	
Nalbari	MADHUPUR	36 NO PUB DHARMAPUR	GAMARIMURI	DHOPARTAL	3	0.03	2016-17	Belsor Sub-div	
Nalbari	MADHUPUR	36 NO PUB DHARMAPUR	GAMARIMURI	MISHRAPARA	4	0.07	2016-17	Belsor Sub-div	
Nalbari	MADHUPUR	36 NO PUB DHARMAPUR	PAHLANPAR	JANARPAR	7	0.04	2016-17	Belsor Sub-div	
Nalbari	MADHUPUR	36 NO PUB DHARMAPUR	PAHLANPAR	BALAPARA	10	0.05	2016-17	Belsor Sub-div	
Nalbari	MADHUPUR	35 NO PASCHIM DHARMAPUR	SANDHELI	SONARA SUPA	2	0.18	2016-17	Belsor Sub-div	

Annexure 4: Location of the action: