



State Level Consultation on Water Quality Issues in Bihar

Workshop Summary



Venue: A.N. College, Patna, Bihar
Date: 12th August 2015

Background

Groundwater is the most important source of drinking water in Bihar as majority of the population (especially rural) depends on it. However, high quantity of Fluoride, Iron and Arsenic in the groundwater of large parts of Bihar is posing grave threat to people's well-being. People are oblivious of the reality and they continue to drink contaminated water, thereby becoming vulnerable. Individuals and organizations, both government and non- government are working at their own individual capacities to understand the issue of water quality in Bihar however there has been minimal sharing of information among them. As a result the work is not moving in a coordinated manner and success is proving elusive. There is an ardent need to bring together existing knowledge and experiences, and evolve them into multipronged sustainable solutions to water quality problems.

Consultation Meeting Objective

A state level consultation meeting was organized in Patna, Bihar on Water Quality Issues in Bihar on 12th August, 2015. The purpose of the consultation was primarily to bring together a group that has been working on water quality issues and to understand the collective needs of communities suffering from water quality issues. It was also to serve as a space to chalk out a rough strategy for a plan towards water quality issues mitigation.

The consultation was attended by more than 25 academics, independent researchers, medical practitioners, local and national NGO's, CSOs, government agencies such as the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) and donor agencies.



This report briefly attempts to cover the key points of the discussion that were held:

Morning Session: The morning session began on an informal note of pair-wise introduction followed by a brief overview given by Ms. Safa Fanaian about the work being done on water quality issues by Arsenic Knowledge & Action Network and Fluoride Knowledge & Action Network. She further highlighted the purpose and objective of the consultation meeting.

To provide context and background to the ensuing consultations there were few presentations. Dr. A.K. Ghosh (A.N. College, Patna) gave an overview of the situation of water quality in Bihar along with the mitigation efforts that have been carried out till date. From his research and experiences in the field for more than a decade, he stressed that bringing together community action and onus is key to any mitigation effort for water quality. Following this, Mr. Siddharth Patil (ACWADAM, Pune) brought out the groundwater data of Bihar. He shared CGWB, Bihar's data on groundwater that says out of 38 districts in Bihar, 7 are fluoride affected, 20 are iron affected and 15 are arsenic affected. He mentioned about the natural divide, Ganga River, which splits Bihar into flood affected north and drought prone south. The north Bihar flood plains are affected dominantly by Arsenic and Iron while Fluoride is a serious issue in the southern regions of the state. He further demonstrated the need to

change the current approach of mitigation strategies, from that which depends on groundwater as a source, to an approach that begins by understanding the resource, i.e. aquifers in the case of groundwater. This highlights the importance of then providing adequate data either on water tested, mitigation options and guidelines that can change the way new actions can improve or further exacerbate the problems

Sharing recent experiences from Khap Tola, Pashchim Champaran, Mr. Siddharth Bhatia (IIM-Ahmedabad) mentioned the need to test water sources and understand the requirement and priority of the community before introducing water filtration technologies or mitigation options. He further mentioned the importance of working with local administration to enable sustained action and credibility. He also highlighted the role youth can play in such processes along with the need to increase spaces where they can be involved and contribute.

Mr. Vinay Kumar (Water Action, Pashchim Champaran) shared his experiences from the field stating the importance of sharing information on water quality with communities in such manner that they can interpret it. He also mentioned that there are alternate options that can be accessed by communities, which requires collective action mobilized through awareness.

Mr. KJ Joy (SOPPECOM, Pune), mentioned of their efforts at building campaign on Right to Water and Sanitation. He expressed about how we can learn from other movements so as to standardize procedures for data collection and knowledge mobilization. He also spoke of the importance of spreading the network to other sectors along with involving the political will to advance the priority given to water quality issues especially within extreme events such as floods and droughts.



The question and answers session brought out the different perspectives

Afternoon Session: The post lunch session, gave space for moderated open discussion to chalk out the plans for mitigation of water quality problems. This session brought out several key points in the area of collecting and understanding existing information systems, devising advocacy, awareness generation/campaign and possible steps for action on ground. These points were further categorized into longer one-year plans and shorter 2-3 months plans.

Short-term plans:

- a. Creating repository of institutions, organization and government bodies working on water issues within Bihar
- b. Create a Google group so as to share information easily
- c. Collect the existing available data, from the relevant departments to create and overlay them to get an existing picture of the existing dated. Sharing of data by all concerned entities for creating a common knowledge base on Arsenic and Fluoride in Bihar.

One-year plans: The plans emerging from the discussion are listed under different categories, however these are not limited to the categories and do overlap in many respects.

Information systems:

- a. Create a data collection protocol/standardized data collection process across India. This will help to know and fill data gaps. It will also help to understand what has already been tried and tested, what has worked and what to do next in these regions. These protocols can be adapted from protocols within existing programs such as the Watershed Development Program.
- b. Collect reports about researches that have occurred till date on water quality from organizations.
- c. Work with government departments to come up with one comprehensive document on water quality situation.

Process document

- a. Collect reports about research's that have occurred till date on water quality form organizations. Also understand the mitigation strategies that these organizations are employing.
- b. Create a template for collecting case studies. For uniform style that can be adopted by all to bring out key learning and challenges.
- c. Document the existing efforts of regional organizations. Document both the success and failures.
- d. Work with the department and create a Policy document on water quality. This can be an evolving document similar to a citizen's report supplemented with qualitative information.
- e. Include and involve scientist and health practitioners to bring in credibility and rigor to the process.

Capacity building

- a. The data and resources should feed literacy and awareness programmes. The information collected needs to be reframed and up such issues such as Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS).
- b. Build capacities of local partners, NGO's and key community members to understand water quality issues along with option and parameter that can be used to serve as solutions.
- c. Build capacity of regional doctors to understand water quality related disease along with diagnosis.
- d. Conduct community awareness campaigns/programs, in different forms of yatra, manthan, samvad so as to enable communities to understand the consequences of water quality.

Advocacy:

- a. District administration should be informed and involved in any activities that are to be carried out. We need to include them within the network activities as well. Create system for briefing new officers on the existing situations on ground on water issues.
- b. We need to involve other constituencies, political class, unions, and private organizations within the network on water quality. Involve water quality as an issue within political agendas. Articulation of water quality issue within the Right to Water discourse.
- c. There should be an advocacy team that can take local issues and solution options to the state and national governmental offices as well. This issue should be advocated at both ends from the community and also at the level of bureaucracy.
- d. Create region specific stakeholder platforms/networks where information can be given so that it is shared.

Table 1: List of Participants and Institution

Name	Institution
Siddharth Patil	ACWADAM, Pune
A.K. Ghosh	A.N. College, Patna
Amar Kumar	A.N. College, Patna
Bibha Kumari	A.N. College, Patna
Chandrajit Kumar	A.N. College, Patna
Ishrat Jahan	A.N. College, Patna
Mini Tiwari	A.N. College, Patna
Nimisha Vatsyayan	A.N. College, Patna
Sangya	A.N. College, Patna
Sushmita	A.N. College, Patna
Ayan Biswas	Arghyam, Bengaluru
Harshvardhan S.Dhawan	Arghyam, Bengaluru
Shanthini	Arghyam, Bengaluru
RR. Shukla	CGWB, Patna
Suresh Kumar	CGWB, Patna
Dr. Hari Shankar Jha	Dadhichi, Samastipur
Ramesh Kumar	Ghoghardiha Prakhand Swarajya Vikas Sangh, Madhubani
Sumit Anand	Gramyasheel, Supaul
Siddharth Bhatia	IIM, Ahmedabad
Minakshi Arora	India Water Portal, New Delhi
Rajendra Jha	KosiSevaSadon, Saharsa
Dr. Arun Kumar	Mahavir Cancer Sansthan, Patna
Eklavya Prasad	MeghPyneAbhiyan, New Delhi
Alka Palrecha	People in Centre, Ahmedabad
Jyotirmay Das	SaciWaters, Hyderabad
Safa Fanaian	SaciWaters, Hyderabad
Prem K.Verma	Samta, Khagaria
Vinay Kumar	Water Action, Pashchim Champaran
K.J. Joy	Water Conflict Forum, Pune
Luisa Cortesi	Yale PhD Scholar, Pune