The cover features a white rectangular area tilted at an angle, set against a background of orange halftone dots. A teal wavy line separates the white area from a light blue halftone background below. The text 'ANNUAL REPORT' is in orange and '2016-17' is in dark blue.

ANNUAL REPORT

2016-17

SIGMA FOUNDATION

ABOUT US

SIGMA (Society for Improvement of Governance and Monitoring Advancement) Foundation is a society registered under the West Bengal Society Registration Act as non-profit society. It is engaged in activities mostly related to water and sanitation and has been working with the community for last three years. It is also engaged in dissemination of knowledge related to community participation, building capacity of local governments in providing water and sanitation related services to the residents.

The society is headed by Dr M.N.Roy, who retired from the Indian Administrative Service as Additional Chief Secretary to the Government of West Bengal and he has wide experience in various aspects of rural development and governance. There are a few other former civil servants and other professionals with experiences in various fields of development and they support the activities of the organization mostly voluntarily. The society is in the process of expanding its activities and establish itself as an organization for conducting research and field studies in various aspects of social development. Advancement in the field of water, sanitation and hygiene along with public health and nutrition and natural resource management towards alleviation of poverty is going to be the focus of the organization. There are several experts including former civil servants in the organization who have good experience in the field of governance, particularly on rural local governance and research, monitoring and evaluation related to Panchayats is going to be another trust area for the organization.

The registered office of the organization is AI 171, New Town, Rajarhat, Kolkata 700156.

OUR EXPERIENCES

This is the third year of functioning of the society after a modest beginning during the year 2014-15. With the experiences gained over the last two years, it has started working with the community in a few areas of West Bengal primarily for advancement of access to water and sanitation as well as ensuring sustainability of water sources and safety of the sources used for drinking, community participation in maintenance of water sources and attainment of ODF status and its sustainability. The organization, appreciating the role of the Panchayats in delivery of basic civic services like water and sanitation has been also started working with a few Gram Panchayats for building their capacity in improving delivery of related services, making participatory planning for making best use of the available funds including that being received as grants of the 14th Finance Commission for improving basic services. It has also gained experience of working with Community Based Organization like the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSCs) and Village health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNCs).

The organization received much experience in visiting the villages and interacting with the community about their problems and how they can solve those with available support from the government or the Panchayat. Many of the villagers with whom the team interacted were women and members of marginalized community. Also delivery of public services in the field of water and sanitation to the women and the children and the poorer households were studied in depth. Experience gained through such interactions is that both improving governance at the level of the Gram Panchayats and empowerment of the community is improving the basic services are critical. While the former can help improving services delivered by the Gram Panchayats more effectively and efficiently, the latter is essential for raising the demand of services and watching its quality particularly by the members of the marginalized community. The organization focused on working in villages with more deprivation and gained experience by visiting such villages. The other experience is that there is dearth of good communication materials for dissemination of essential information related to improving access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Also, empowering the community is a slow process requiring sustained effort for making an impact. The organization also interacted with some of the SHGs and their clusters/federations so that they can be empowered as a group to handle their problems related to water and sanitation locally with possible support from the Panchayats. Working with the cluster/federation of the SHGs were found to be more rewarding and their empowerment can help improving services with sustainability.

These experiences helped the organization to take appropriate strategy to utilize the little resources it could mobilize for improving water, sanitation and hygiene related services. It was also felt that there is need for networking with Gram Panchayats other NGOs and funding agencies in future to have more impact on the lives of the people.

OUR PROJECTS

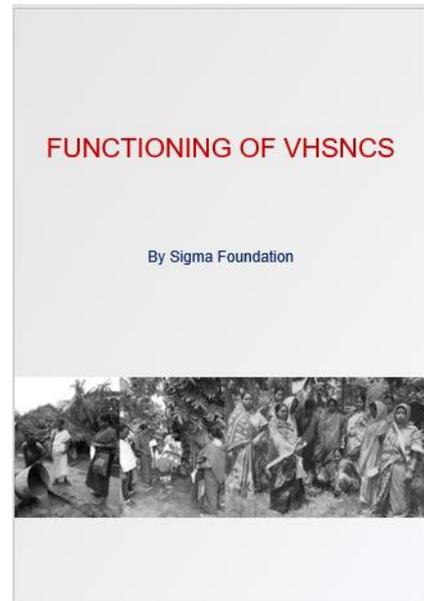
Development of communication materials

Several communication materials in the form of booklets covering different aspects of water and sanitation were developed. The books were written in language which even neo-literates will find that easy to read and internalize. Four different thematic aspects were covered as mentioned below:

Functioning of VHSNCs:

The VHSNCs are community based organization to take up different activities for promotion of public health, sanitation and nutrition. It was found from interaction with the VHSNC members that they have inadequate understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The Panchayat & Rural Development Department of the Government of

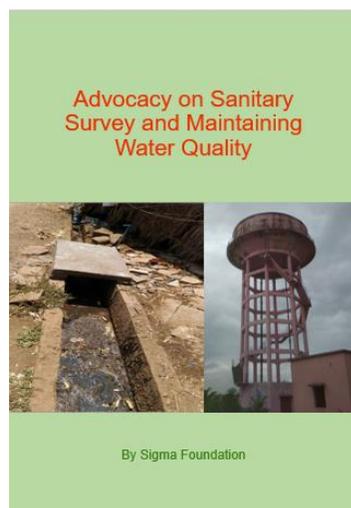
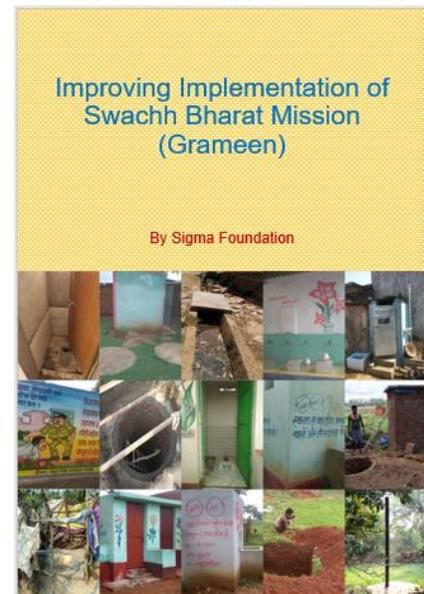
West Bengal launched an innovative scheme known as the Community health Care Management Initiative (CHCMI) under which one SHG member was trained and given an honorarium to take up various activities. On the other hand similar work had to be done as member of VHSNCs without any honorarium which required orientation of the members to change their mindset. Each VHSNC has a bank account and maintaining of records and related documents as well as preparing annual plan and its implementation were required to be explained to the members. Majority of the members of the VHSNCs are women as per guidelines and that aspect was also taken into account while designing the booklet.



The booklet was used to organize a day long orientation of such members in a few villages of Patharpratima Block of South 24 Parganas and Ghatal Block of West Midnapur districts.

Improving Implementation of Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen):

Implementation of SBM(G) is focused on construction of household toilet. There is little emphasis on improving sanitation in public domain and institutions like schools, Anganwadi centers etc. Maintenance and cleanliness of the public toilets and those at the institutions is generally quite poor. The team of SIGMA Foundation made some quick studies and came out with some actionable points. A leaflet was developed for promotion of these aspects of sanitation along with improving village cleanliness through proper management of solid and liquid wastes.



The booklet was distributed in 5 villages in the districts of South 24 Parganas and West Midnapur. The team also interacted with some of the Panchayat functionaries and sensitized them on various aspects of holistic sanitation.

Advocacy on Sanitary Survey and Maintaining Water Quality:

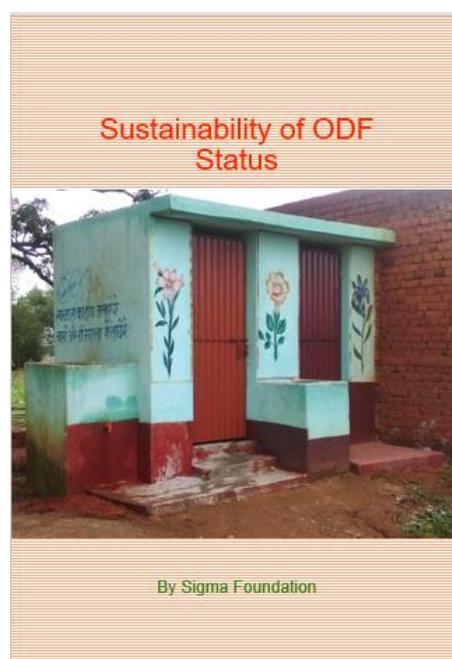
It was observed through visits to the villages and interactions with the Gram Panchayat functionaries and the community that there is lack of awareness of water quality and how the

community can protect the drinking water sources. The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation of the Government of India has advised to conduct sanitary survey of the water sources. Some of the members of SIGMA Foundation got exposed to the system of sanitary survey being conducted in Maharashtra and prepared leaflet on how Gram Panchayats can conduct such survey. The booklet was distributed in 5 villages in the said two districts. Some of the officials of the State Government were also given feedback on conducting sanitary survey along with systematic analysis of the findings for improving sanitary status of the drinking water sources.

Sustainability of ODF Status:

Visits to the villages also helped the team of SIGMA Foundation to gain insight on the reasons behind slip back of ODF GPs. The following reasons were found to be critical:

- (i) Some of the family members, particularly the adult male above 50 years found it difficult to adopt new toilet behaviour and preferred to go to the open for defecation. They used the toilet under pressure and strong watch of the Vigilance Committees (*pada najardari* committees) constituted in the village. After the GP is declared ODF the Committees stopped functioning and some of the persons started practicing open defecation. There was need for continuation of the Committees on a sustained and follow up by the block and districts, which did not always happen.
- (ii) Some of the households did not have their own toilets and 100% coverage was worked out merely based on the households who were listed in the baseline survey of 2012. Before declaring the GP these households were asked to use toilets of other families which was not a sustainable arrangement. There is need to construct individual toilets for each household.
- (iii) New households created due to splitting of families did not get any subsidy and were using toilets of their parent families. There is need to construct toilet of those households.
- (iv) Some of the toilets constructed many years ago became unfit for use and even totally defunct. Such toilets were to be repaired or new toilets were to be constructed for which there was no subsidy from SBM(G). Some of the GPs utilized funds of MGNREGS and others need to follow the same.



- (v) In some cases the family size was very large and in the rush hour of the morning some of the male members and the children went outside for defecation.
- (vi) The IEC activities were around construction and use of toilet and there was little emphasis on hygienic handling of child faeces. In many families in ODF GPs the child faeces were being thrown out which amounted to open defecation. There was need for more advocacy on hygienic handling of child faces and using the toilet for rinsing child excreta for the babies who are unable to sit.
- (vii) The newly split families who were poor could not afford to construct their toilet while constructing their house. There is need for proper watch of the GPs to ensure that toilets are constructed along with construction of new houses.
- (viii) In areas having brick field etc., where large number of workers come to work during the working season there is very poor arrangement for their sanitary needs. There has to be proper advocacy and watch on such units.
- (ix) There is a huge gap in use and cleanliness of toilets of the AWCs and to some extent in the schools.

All these issues were compiled into a booklet and shared with some of the officials and GP functionaries of South 24 Parganas district for their orientation and necessary action.

Development of indicators for assessing status of sanitation:

The experts of the organization extended help to Riddhi Foundation in developing indicators for assessing the status of sanitation for the State of Maharashtra. The SBM(G) MIS generates secondary data only on construction of toilet and there is no system of monitoring actual usage and related parameters to judge status of sanitation and hygiene in any particular area. One such tool was being developed by Riddhi Foundation as the KRC of the State and the experts of SIGMA Foundation assisted them to identify the indicators. Some of the members of the SIGMA Foundation has adequate exposure of status of sanitation in rural Maharashtra and also advised to include access to water which is problematic in certain parts of the State. A couple of experts on ICT associated with SIGMA Foundation assisted the team developing an Android run mobile application capture and upload the parameters using the mobile application. SIGMA Foundation also helped the team of developer to undertake some changes for getting better insight of the status. The following indicators were found to be optimum in assessing the status of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene and data started getting collected during the year.

Household toilet and related issues:

1. Access to toilets
2. Functionality of toilet
3. Availability of water for use in toilet

4. Usage of toilet
5. Availability and use of soap/other cleaning materials
6. Type of toilets
7. Maintenance and cleanliness of toilets
8. Disposal of child excreta

Status of institutional toilet (in Anganwadi centres, Schools and Gram Panchayats):

1. Access to toilet and its functionality
2. Availability of water for use in toilet
3. Access to soap and other cleaning materials
4. Maintenance of toilet
5. Availability of hand wash station

Community Sanitation and management of waste:

1. No of households using community toilet
2. No of households using shared toilet
3. Village Cleanliness Index (as per formula prescribed by the MDWS, GOI)
4. SLWM index (as per formula prescribed by the MDWS, GOI)
5. Functioning of village level monitoring committee to prevent open defecation

Access to drinking water:

1. Households having piped water connection within the premises
2. Households having access to piped water from stand post
3. Households depending on other protected sources like tube well/protected well
4. Households depending on open sources like village tank/ river etc.
5. Seasonality of water availability and crisis if any during certain months
6. System of monitoring water quality and follow up measures
7. Sanitary survey of the water sources

Study on decentralized planning in West Bengal:

The experts of SIGMA Foundation visited 6 Gram Panchayats of West Bengal to study the system of decentralized planning. The State have taken several initiatives in the past two decades or so for promotion of participatory planning with support of DFID Govt. of UK and the World Bank. The team made quick visits to the selected GPs with different history of receiving support under the said programme for assessing the difference in planning methodology and priority adopted in different contexts in which the GPs were placed. The findings provided some insights into the system of decentralized planning and the barriers as well as the good practices. The following lessons were found to be important:

1. There is need for more institutionalization and involvement of the block and district officials

2. The Gram Panchayats should be communicated about the flow of funds well in time and if possible the time by which the same is expected to be credited
3. There is more emphasis on physical construction while aspects of human development, many of which are intangible and process oriented than being money intensive were not receiving enough attention.
4. There is scope for involvement of Gram Panchayats in assessing the quality and coverage of delivery of services by village level facilities like the health sub-centres, ICDS centres and schools and taking up planned interventions, many of which involve no cost or little cost, for improving both access and uptake of services to the marginalized community.
5. There is need for giving more emphasis on wellbeing of the women and children and those facing extreme poverty.
6. More integration of GPDP with MGNREGS and SRLM for alleviation of poverty
7. Some of the GPs were found to improve their own revenue but use of the same for Gram Panchayat plan can be improved further.
8. There is little use of data in objectively assessing the status of development under different sectors and there is need for strengthening the same which will make envisioning for planned development more evidence based and objective.
9. There is also need for developing a monitoring framework for assessing both physical progress as well as timely utilization of resources.

Representatives of SIGMA Foundation met the officials of the Panchayat & RD Department of the Government of West Bengal associated with decentralized planning and briefed them about the findings. These were taken up very well and was found to be very helpful feedback to them.

Workshop on FFC and improving basic services:

The 14th Finance Commission had recommended flow of funds to the Gram Panchayats only. Also, the amount of fund flow has increased substantially compared to what used to flow as per recommendation of the 13th Finance Commission. Both the Ministry of Panchayati raj of the Government of India and the State Governments have been working to make best use of the grants in improving basic services in the villages and in building capacities of the Gram Panchayats. A workshop was organized by SIGMA Foundation involving former Member of the West Bengal State Finance Commission and retired and serving officials of the State Government with knowledge in this field. The issues and the problems were discussed threadbare to find out ways for improving utilization of 14th FC funds by the Gram Panchayats. The following key areas of interventions emerged out of the workshop:

1. There is need for improving the capacity of the GP functionaries in better understanding of why funds are transferred to those bodies and how the same should be utilized by the GPs in improving basic services.
2. It was felt that like in the urban areas the standard for service delivery in rural areas should be established which may act as a benchmark to judge the quality of services currently available with the Gram Panchayats. This will help them to identify the gap in all types of basic services and the same may be used for envisioning the required planned interventions.
3. The state is already using spatial maps in planning using a web based system. Preparation of maps showing the status/gaps in service delivery will help better planning.
4. Improving the processes followed in GPDP to measure the gaps in service delivery through primary survey and involving the people will be useful.
5. There should be special emphasis on improving services related to water and sanitation including better management of solid and liquid wastes in the villages. The drainage system in the villages is very poor and since the state receives high rainfall there are many public health issues arising out of stagnated water. This aspect was thought to deserve more attention.
6. The Government of West Bengal had decided that the Piped Water Supply Schemes (PWSS) would be handed over to the VWSCs and the VWSCs have to work under the general guidance of the Gram Panchayats. Also, funding of the O&M activities of the transferred PWSSs are to be from the grants available from the 14th FC. There is gap in understanding of the GPs/members of the VWSCs and the issue related to maintenance of the PWSSs need to be properly understood. It will be better that there should be a proper study on understanding the issue. SIGMA Foundation members expressed willingness to take up such study.

Financial Status and other organizational issues:

The society continued to receive the patronage of its well-wishers who donated to keep the activities of the organization going. There was a drive to collect more fund to take up some research activities. A total amount of Rs 1.15 lakh was collected during the year and an expenditure of Rs 0.76 lakh was made in carrying out activities of the Foundation. It was expected that from the year 2016-17 onward formal work of other organizations can be taken up with the likely additional collection of funds. Some organizational strengthening also started during the year for being able to take up assignments on different fields on which it has expertise.