

Research messages reach policy makers....

WASHCost (India) Project makes headway at state and national level

Dr Snehalatha, Country Coordinator shares news of some “breakthrough opportunities” in embedding WASHCost research findings in the WASH policy framework of Andhra Pradesh and at national level.

The WASHCost (India) Project is finalising key messages and preliminary findings from research, and simultaneous efforts are being made to “embed” them into the state and national policy framework and to inform other key stakeholders and policy makers. Dr Snehalatha, Country Coordinator, WASHCost (India) Project shares the latest developments and progress.



Dr Snehalatha, Country Coordinator, WASHCost (India) Project shared the latest developments on the embedding process of WASHCost (India) Project.

A team from WASHCost (India) visited Delhi in July and August 2011 to meet national level stakeholders, civil societies and governmental agencies associated with the drinking water, sanitation and hygiene programmes. They included WES-NET, World Bank, UNICEF, European Union, Department

of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Planning Commission, Government of India. The WASHCost (India) Project team consisting of Dr. Ratna Reddy, Dr. Snehalatha, Dr. Charles Batchelor and Mr Baby Kurian visited these organisations and agencies to share and learn.

During the meeting with WES-NET, a national level forum of civil society organisations, the participants shared the field realities that emerge from the research and discussed the challenge of effectively communicating key messages to government in such a way to bring about the necessary changes in policy.

IRC invited to anchor the Capacity Building programme

The response from the Government of India was positive. A meeting with Mr Arun Kumar Misra, Secretary and Mr. TM Vijay Bhaskar, Joint Secretary, Department of Drinking Water Supply opened several opportunities for collaboration. Although they see costs as an important issue, the main concern of the Government of India is sustainable service delivery and building the capacity of stakeholders. The Department, IRC and UNICEF discussed the possibilities of a tripartite agreement for an international capacity building programme for the senior officials of the drinking water and sanitation department. These will be delivered at IRC in The Netherlands, identified as being one of the best international resource centres for capacity building on WASH issues. Mr Misra suggested that WASHCost (India) team should take lead in drawing up a capacity building agenda in association

with other training organisations in Hyderabad, such as National Institute of Rural Development. This is an opportunity to integrate the main findings of WASHCost (India) Project into these capacity building modules.

Membership of working group for 12th Five Year Plan

Dr. Mihir Shah, who is a member of the GoI Planning Commission, was appreciative of the WASHCost preliminary findings as presented in briefing notes prepared by the project team, saying that he was looking for exactly this kind of study as a reality check on investments and services levels in the WASH sector. Dr Shah was also impressed with the spatial data analysis that used GIS mapping to highlight inequities in WASH services in rural areas. He suggested that WASHCost (India) should produce a high quality academic paper giving evidences of inappropriate investments, inequity in WASH services and functioning of governance systems in rural areas, if possible for publication in Economic and Political Weekly, an internationally reputed Indian journal. He requested a soft copy of findings to help him in drafting the approach paper on domestic drinking water and sanitation in the 12th Five Year Plan, and proposed that Dr. Snehalatha join the working group on rural drinking water and sanitation, which is preparing an approach paper for the Plan. Dr Shah suggested that the WASHCost (India) team should conduct a forensic analysis of current guidelines of WASH sector in the country and propose ways and means of improving them.

Contributing to the policy formulation processes...

Dr. Snehalatha joined the working group for its 5th meeting (it had been functioning since April 2011). Membership is a significant opportunity to contribute directly to the national policy formulation processes. It gives Dr Snehalatha an opportunity to interface directly with the government agencies, research groups and NGOs, who have the mandate to conceptualise the policy framework. At her first meeting Dr. Snehalatha was given an opportunity to share WASHCost insights on WASH sector and to provide feedback on the issues/recommendations that the working group already conceptualised. She emphasised the need to increase the investments for capital maintenance and operation & maintenance of WASH facilities and for higher allocations for sanitation, particularly investments on promotional and IEC activities.

She also took this opportunity to highlight the need to look at the life cycle costs of WASH services and for appropriate budgetary allocations at different levels. The working group was already focused on operation and maintenance, and on supplementary institutional structures and funding strategies with regard to O&M. There was considerable consistency between the thinking of the working group and the preliminary findings of WASHCost (India) Project. Wasteful expenditure due to lack of capital maintenance was explained and well received by the government and taken on board as a major recommendation to address. The minutes of the working group meetings included a recommendation to consider life cycles costs and to focus allocations for capital maintenance. It was also suggested that the four parameters used in the WASHCost research to analyse service delivery (quantity, quality, accessibility and reliability) are included in the government monitoring process and the IMIS online monitoring system.

WASHCost (India) has been advised by working group members and institutions to conduct an analysis of wasteful expenditure in the WASH sector and clearly indicate how this could be minimised through pilots or models on the ground, which would attract the attention of policy makers and project managers. Dr Snehalatha has indicated to Mr T M Vijay Bhaskar, Joint Secretary, of the Department of Drinking Water Supply, that WASHCost (India) would like to take up pilots if funds are available. This would imply a 2nd level in-depth analysis of existing data by WASHCost (India) to generate evidence of “wasteful” investments and to initiate pilots to minimize wasteful investments.

WASHCost (India) anchors the planning process for WASH Sector for Andhra Pradesh - State Five Year Plan (2012-2017):

Another big opportunity comes through an invitation to help shape design future WASH policies and programmes for Andhra Pradesh. The Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS) in Hyderabad is anchoring the process of developing the 12th Five Year Plan for the Government of Andhra Pradesh, and has given WASHCost (India) the responsibility of designing the policy framework for the WASH sector. WASHCost (India) team has already organised meetings with representatives of concerned agencies in the state to seek their inputs. The main suggestions and recommendations from this working group are defining processes for village level micro plans (a comprehensive plan to look at all WASH factors together); facilitating convergence with related departments/ agencies for effective utilisation of services; facilitating a shift from an emphasis on infrastructure to behaviour change in case of sanitation; improving investments for the sanitation sector and support systems for operation and maintenance.

Interview and Documentation by: MV Rama Chandrudu and Safa Fanaian WASSAN

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