

Bonkanali village (West Bengal) gets water and sanitation access: No one is left behind

By

Mary Abraham,

Mu Gamma Consultants, Gurugram

In India, there has been significant progress in the last decade toward ending open defecation throughout the country, resulting in significant improvements in access to water, sanitation, and hygiene. The Swachh Bharat Mission (2014, 2019) and the Jal Jeevan Mission (2019) have made tremendous progress in improving the sanitation and water supply access in rural and urban India. Yet, several geographically difficult regions such as the Bonkanali in Purulia District of West Bengal, located in the forests of mountainous range, are lagging far behind.

The Bonkanali village, also known as Sabar Tola (named after the Sabar community) are an



impoverished community, which makes up seven percent of the total population of Purulia District. A shortage of annual rainfall in Purulia has resulted in very low agricultural production, making this tribe unable to resort to agriculture. Forests are therefore the primary source of livelihood and these people hunt, fish, and collect wood from the forest.

People in Purulia lack basic amenities like electricity, water access, and sanitary facilities. Electricity shortages have restricted the provision of basic facilities in the region, including water supply. The lack of adequate sanitation contributes to the rapid spread of diseases, resulting in a substantial economic and personal burden further spiralling the vicious circle of poverty and underdevelopment.

Save The Environment (STE) has been working towards enhancing development and improving environment in the most backward areas. The water and sanitation interventions in Bonkanali village is one such example that we have recently undertaken.

Reaching out to the most vulnerable and untouched

Sabar Tola, where about 10 families belonging to the Sabar community live near the Swapnaloke school. We interacted with the community and understood their challenges of safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, which was compounded due to lack of electricity in the area. The STE founders and members raised crowd funding of nearly 5 Lakhs INR, installed drinking water-cum-WASH facilities and are installing toilets in phases. In the absence of electricity in the area, the drinking water system-cum-WASH unit is powered by solar energy. **Our interventions include the installation of three toilets, two for households in the region and one specifically for students at the school.** There have been intense community engagements, behaviour change campaigns, inter-personal communication, education and generation of ownership at the community level. About twenty students at the school and approximately forty people living in the vicinity in Bonkanali village have greatly benefited from this project.



These WASH interventions in this remote and geographically challenged region is expected to contribute to the control of infectious diseases, improved child and adult health, reduction in morbidity, mortality and contribute towards the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6. The interventions are not only contributing to water and sanitation access in the region but has also stimulated the uptake of clean energy technologies for water supply in difficult areas with limited access to electricity. This work is still under process.

This is a replicable, scalable, sustainable model of WASH access with clean energy in remote rural areas.