



water for people
INDIA
EVERYONE • FOREVER



An initiative to build a robust system for maintenance and timely repair of drinking water sources, ensuring sustained access to safe water for rural communities whilst creating community-based jobs.

Introduction

India, with an immense population of 1.3 billion, is fast moving towards becoming a water-stressed nation due to unequal distribution of scarce water resources. From urban to rural, coastal to inlands, mountains to deserts, India continues to struggle with managing and sustaining water at the source.

GROUND WATER
accounts for
over 60%

of the irrigated area in India and is a critical element to the livelihoods of millions of people.



Eight million tube wells are the only drinking source for

about **85%** of the rural population. As a major source of drinking water, hand pumps are abundant in rural India. According to the 2011 Census,

about **44%** of rural households in India reported hand pumps as their main source of water.

Overall, across the country, there has been a notable shift from unimproved to improved water sources, including piped water supply and hand pumps, since the government of India launched the **National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP)** in 2009. On August 15, 2019, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India announced the Jal Jeevan Mission - a people's mission at the grassroots level for a unified goal of sustainable water supply management. Through this mission, the next five years (2019-2024) are set to witness unprecedented engagement from communities and people from all walks of life.

The **Jal Jeevan Mission** has an ambitious goal of providing safe and sustainable drinking water to every rural household of India. One notable feature of the Jal Jeevan Mission is in its tagline **#JanShakti4JalShakti** (a people's movement) and commitment to the operation and maintenance (O&M – functionality, subsequent repair, replacement and preventive maintenance) of water supply systems.



Need for Hand Pump Sustainability

Safe drinking water is critical to human health and development. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation has far-reaching impact for achieving equality and creating an inclusive society. Hand pumps are heavily relied upon for providing drinking water in rural areas of low- and middle-income countries, but their operation and maintenance remain problematic. Since its inception in 1996, Water For People India has designed and implemented high-quality water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs to address these issues in sustainable ways.

Annual monitoring data has revealed that a large number of hand pumps were defunct or in poor working condition. During breakdowns that lasted on average between 10-15 days, many families resorted to unsafe water sources. In some cases, the disrepair caused the community to abandon these handpumps permanently. A World Water Corps study also found that some of the water points experienced downtime of up to 40-50 days. Lack of skilled mechanics in the community, high cost of repairs, and

difficulty obtaining spare parts were cited as some of the reasons for the prolonged downtime.

In 2009, Water For People India piloted the “Jalabandhu” initiative - which translates to “friend of water” in Bengali. The pilot took place in a subsection of South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal, which invested in building a cadre of caretakers within the communities to be responsible for regular operations and maintenance of drinking water systems.

Jalabandhus - The Game Changers

The Jalabandhus are mobile hand pump mechanics responsible for making sure broken pumps are fixed as soon as possible, so that community members don't have to go without safe water. Having local mechanics improves the sustainability of water points since pumps can be repaired anytime they break down. This initiative also served as a business opportunity for local youth who are engaged by the community as either mechanics or caretakers for water systems.

The Approach

Interested village youth were provided technical training on repair and maintenance, and provided with toolkits. The initiative was intended to make community-level technical human resources (Jalabandhu) always available in the communities for repair, maintenance, and professional services on a regular basis. Most villages were using laborers with rudimentary skills, who were beckoned when something broke down. In contrast, Jalabandhus are trained on various equipment and technology, and their focus is on preventive maintenance to keep the water flowing. The Jalabandhu is selected by community leaders and trained in the maintenance and repairs of tube wells. The Jalabandhu documents the repairs and notes the visit on a sticker placed on the well for all to see. The outcomes of the pilot project were impressive:

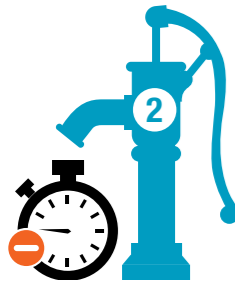
- 217 local youth were trained on hand pump repair
- Special toolkits were provided to Jalabandhus to address the repairing needs of hand pumps
- Jalabandhus were promoted across their communities as entrepreneurs

Safe Water is a Human Right – How Jalabandhus are Making This Happen

For an initiative that started small in South 24 Parganas in 2009, Water For People India's Jalabandhu system now actively addresses operational and management gaps, responding to O&M requests from the communities they serve with the following objectives:



Maintain hand pumps and water supply schemes to ensure continuous access to safe water.



Reduce downtime to repair or replace non-functioning water points by ensuring the availability of skilled hand pump mechanics in the community.



Professionalize and create business opportunities for local individuals by not only providing training and repair kits, but also connecting them to the water point governing bodies for sustained work.

ventures of other Jalabandhus or have since migrated to other areas in search of work. In addition to providing indispensable services to their community, some have succeeded in expanding their business to other communities and private clients. In 2012, with funding from the government, another cohort of 55 Jalabandhus were trained to cover five blocks in South 24 Parganas.

In 2012-13, Water For People India expanded its WASH program to Sheohar District in Bihar. The infrastructure or hardware component of the program was complemented with the recruitment and training of local Jalabandhus. In total, 106 Jalabandhus in Sheohar were trained on repair and maintenance of hand pumps and supplied with basic toolkits. Similar to the approach used in West Bengal, each Jalabandhu in Sheohar was linked to a WUC and its respective water point. Since then, an additional 114 Jalabandhus have been trained in the area. Their earnings ranged from INR 3000-8000 per month.

The initiative is a unique effort to provide water and sanitation to Everyone in targeted districts and municipalities - Forever. The Jalabandhu initiative ensures that these districts and communities will not need to rely on support from external agencies to address their WASH challenges. It provides a model for greater replication, leading to a push for national water and sanitation coverage. The initiative creates entrepreneurs within the community and trains them to live a life of dignity and independence. At the same time, this ensures that the community WASH systems function well.

Reach and Impact

Water For People India conceptualized the Jalabandhu program in 2008 before implementation in 2009 in South 24 Parganas. The first cohort of 55 Jalabandhus received a five-day training and regular follow-ups with Water For People field team. The graduating Jalabandhus were then connected to **Water User Committees (WUCs)**, who would formally procure their services.

Each Jalabandhu was responsible for approximately 70-200 hand pumps. Of the 55 Jalabandhus from the first cohort, 27 remain active while others are either collaborating with

Building Skills for Sustainable Water Systems

With continuous support from Water For People India and direct engagement with the community, the Jalabandhus now form a strong and independent network of professional mechanics who play a vital role in making sure that a water point is functional at all times. Since the inception of the initiative, the average downtime of hand pumps has been reduced from 10-15 days to 3-5 days.

The Jalabandhu's skill set is ever-expanding and in demand for various kinds of work. They perform minor repair work such as chain fittings and replacement of hand pump parts, as well as complex tasks such as repair of machinery underground, including cylinder repair, pipe replacement, connecting and fitting rods, and changing washers. In addition to repairing hand pumps, some Jalabandhus have also been trained for plumbing and pipeline work. Water For People India plans to expand training for Jalabandhus to include installation and maintenance of piped water schemes in the coming years. Additionally, some Jalabandhus work closely with the GPs

and their Village Water and Sanitation Committees to respond to service needs. Jalabandhus are also often called upon to repair private water points as well.

The initiative has a monitoring component that helps document Jalabandhus' progress as well as programmatic gaps and needs. Every two months, Jalabandhus' work is reviewed at block level meetings. The review process, which includes an assessment of the repair work and the time taken to restore water points, helps provide feedback to Jalabandhus. Additionally, the Jalabandhus are given the opportunity to share their experiences with the community at these meetings. Based on the community's assessment and the experiences of the Jalabandhus, Water For People India implementing partners decide whether additional training or support is needed.

Regular trainings are provided to Jalabandhus to enhance their skills, to cover subjects like installation of submersibles/handpumps, repair of motors, etc., to help them sustain financially. The initiative has also resulted in a reduction of woman-hours lost in collecting water for household purposes.



Forging a Lasting Relationship with Water

- Business opportunities with projects of the Government of India - The Jal Jeevan Mission
- Interface with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)
- Build on the sanitation market supply chain
- Women empowerment



As of now, there are 131 Jalabandhus operating in three districts in West Bengal (24 Parganas, Birbhum) and Bihar (Sheohar). As interest grows, so does the number of young people signing up to be a “Friend of Water.” Ultimately, the Jalabandhu program will continue to offer a unique solution, built around the priorities of community ownership, long-term investment, and sustainability. This is exactly what Water For People India and communities across India are aiming for. This is just one example of how all the key actors (NGOs, governments, the private sector, and communities) can work together to achieve access to clean water for ‘Everyone Forever’.



Water For People India recognizes that no one can solve the global water and sanitation crisis alone, but believes that proven models can be replicated on a national scale. By providing sustainable water and sanitation services, no community or school served will need to return to unsafe drinking water and unimproved toilets. The Jalabandhu initiative has come a long way and expanded into several other blocks and districts and continues to evolve in response to changing demands and new opportunities.

By building on the budding relationship and contract between Jalabandhus and the local governments, we can create a sustainable system that evolves based on district demand and resources. The Jalabandhu initiative could further expand through engagement with additional private and public entities, while responding to market forces to make a bigger impact through the following:

In Their Words... #BeingAJalabandhu



Rina Paik Mondal, a college graduate and homemaker from Bapuji GP in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, is an enthusiastic and enterprising Jalabandhu. Even before becoming a Jalabandhu, she could be found advocating for important social issues with the local government or leading self-help groups. “When Water For People India started recruiting Jalabandhus in my village, I was eager to join the cadre of hand pump mechanics,” she shared. “Being a married woman with children did not deter me from taking on a ‘man’s job,’ as I always find ways to engage in community work,” Rina said with a beaming smile.

Once Rina completed the initial training and received a set of hand pump repair tools, along with promotional materials such as banners and leaflets from Water For People India, she was ready to start working. Her personable demeanour, strong skill sets, and excellent rapport with the community members quickly propelled her to prominence. She reached out to other Jalabandhus and recruited local youth to form a team of people to respond to service requests. In addition to repair and maintenance tasks, she mobilized the local communities through water and hygiene awareness camps and encouraged them to form WUCs. What made Rina’s endeavour a success is her passion and dedication towards community development.



Debasis Mondal’s bright orange vest signifies the important role he plays in communities in his gram panchayat in West Bengal. He’s a Jalabandhu – a “Friend of Water.” When there were no Jalabandhus in the gram panchayat, it used to take almost a month to address repairs. The long repair time meant community members would wait long periods without safe water and would have to walk further distances to find an alternative – often from an unsafe source.

“I felt that the gram panchayat needed a trained mechanic, so I decided to start my business as a Jalabandhu. Being able to serve the community members with drinking water is what makes me proud of my work,” explains Debasis, who currently repairs three to four hand pumps a week. He responds whenever a community, school, or gram panchayat leader calls him. Moving forward, Debasis is focused on continuing to provide the best and quickest service he can to his customers, because he knows how critical safe water is.

About Us

The Jalabandhu Initiative in West Bengal, India, is one of many ways Water For People India ensures that communities have access to safe water long after construction and installation of a system. In addition to Jalabandhus, Water For People India has other programs including the installation of arsenic filtration systems, community drinking water filtration systems, and the construction of sanitation facilities, particularly for school children.

Water For People India has a strong commitment to sustainability through its impact model ‘Everyone Forever’ with consistent monitoring and project performance tracking long after construction and implementation.

This dedication ensures that communities not only feel the direct and indirect benefits of increased access to clean water and sanitation, but that they also cultivate a pervasive and powerful appreciation for how these services benefit families across India.

Friend of Water

“No job can earn you both blessings and income in equal measure!”



JOIN US

Let's reach every family, every school and health centre **TOGETHER**.
Your support can help us make India's water challenge
a problem of the past – for **EVERYONE FOREVER!**



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