

# CSOs Review of National Accountability Mechanism for SDG 6

INDIA



**6** CLEAN WATER  
AND SANITATION



## **Glossary**

CII - Confederation of Indian Industries

CSO – Civil Society Organisations

CPR – Centre for Policy Research

FANSA – Freshwater Action Network South Asia

GOI – Government of India

GP – Gram Panchayat

GPDP – Gram Panchayat Development Plans

HLPF – High level Political Forum

JMP – Joint Mission Report

LNOB – Leave No One Behind

MDWS – Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation

MOSPI – Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

NIRD - National Institute for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj

NIPFP- National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP)

NIUA - National Institute of Urban Affairs

NFHS – National Family Health Survey

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

ODF – Open Defection Free

PMKSY – Prime Minister Krishi Sinchanyi Yojna

RIS - Research and Information Systems for Developing Countries

SAP – Swachhta Annual Plans

SBM – Swachh Bharat Mission

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

TERI – The Energy Resource Institute

UN – United Nations

VNR – Voluntary National Review

WNTA – Wada Na Todo Abhiyan

**Executive Summary:**

Freshwater Action Water Network (South Asia) FANSA had undertaken a study on Accountability Mechanisms related to SDG 6 in all South Asian countries in the year 2018, including India as part of a global study. Many processes appear to have been set in motion at the national level, including the VNR and community consultations to explore the actual situation. Many states have also been active in incorporating the SDG components into their respective Vision/Strategy documents. This report takes stock of the developments that have taken place since the last report and specifically highlights the accountability mechanisms at all levels in some detail.

Section 2 has highlighted the key policies and schemes that have been enunciated by the Government of India from 2018. This section has highlighted the key institutional accountability mechanisms, which the Government of India is slowly establishing.

Section 3 has outlined in detail the key data systems/platforms that have been established both at the central and state levels. Section 4 has also gone into detail regarding the experiences of some states in taking forward the institutional/accountability systems and in the process has highlighted the nuances in some of the states.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Country Context and Current Policies and Schemes introduced by the Government of India in the WASH Sector:

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 4), 2015-16, 98.30% of rural households in the country get tap water and 91.10% of the urban households of the country are covered with improved water supply source<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, only 18.33% of the rural population have access to piped water supply through household connection. In a similar vein, close to 60% of all people in the world who defecate in the open live in India. Human excreta are often captured in unlined latrine pits from where excreta freely leach into ground water. Also, where latrines are emptied, the faecal sludge is frequently dumped into surrounding water bodies. Both pollute water, and cause negative health impacts on communities. Inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene facilities in school are also emerging as major challenges. The JMP report (2015) stated that 45% of schools in India lack basic facilities of water and soap, and 22% do not have basic sanitation facilities. Similarly, 9% of the health care facilities lack access to drinking water and 45% lack sanitation facilities (Agenda 2030: Leave No One Behind, Multiple Challenges of Marginalised Communities in Achieving SDGs, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, September 2019). The same (WNTA) report has also highlighted that marginalised groups such as women, children, refugees, indigenous people, people with disabilities, and others are currently living without access to water and sanitation facilities. According to NFHS 4, there are 36.7% and 48.4% population in rural and urban areas with improved sanitation facilities respectively<sup>2</sup>.

Since 1947 the Government has been implementing a number of initiatives in the WASH sector. The National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) was launched for ensuring sustainability of water availability in terms of portability, adequacy, convenience, affordability and equity. The provision of adequate sanitation coverage in rural India was a major challenge due to its heterogeneous socio-economic conditions. Keeping this in mind the Government of India launched the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) with its ambitious goal of providing universal sanitation by 2019. Since the launch of the SBM-R in 2014, over 10 crore toilets have been built in rural areas, and over 5.9 lakh villages, 699 districts, and 35 States/UTs have declared themselves ODF. Five years into SBM, in October 2019, the government declared India Open Defecation Free (Economic Survey 2019-20, Government of India). Based on this development, the Government of India announced in the Budget Speech 2020-21 that it would like to transition into "ODF Plus" to sustain ODF behaviour and also focus on ODF Plus activities by including liquid and grey water management, solid waste collection, source segregation and processing, and awareness generation on personal hygiene. The other significant development over the past one year is the decision by the Government of India to provide piped water (Jal Jeevan Mission) to all by 2024 with an emphasis on the safety of the water supplied. This along with the comprehensive sanitation programme, Swachh Bharat Mission, will also support the government's "health vision" and reduce

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<sup>1</sup> Improved water source signifies piped water into dwelling/yard/plot, public tap/standpipe, tube well or borehole, protected dug well, protected spring, rainwater, community RO plant.

<sup>2</sup> Improved sanitation facility signifies Flush to piped sewer system, flush to septic tank, flush to pit latrine, ventilated improved pit (VIP)/biogas latrine, pit latrine with slab, twin pit/composting toilet, which is not shared with any other household.

the disease burden among the poor. Apart from this, it is envisaged that the JJ Mission will also place emphasis on augmenting local water sources, recharging existing sources and reuse of grey water. A major institutional reform came into force in May 2019, when the Government of India formed the Ministry of Jal Shakti, which merged two ministries: Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation and Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation. It remains to be seen how this Ministry will bring convergence of schemes/programmes between the Department of Water Resources and the Department of Drinking Water.

Notwithstanding the various initiatives undertaken by the Government, the fact remains that India is still far from achieving the 2030 Agenda in SDG 6, which could be attributed to the following factors given below:

- WASH schemes conceived by the Government of India are essentially implemented as a central sponsored scheme and though state government (through the 14<sup>th</sup> finance commission have access to greater funds, they are not necessarily investing on WASH initiatives from their kitty, but are merely carrying out incremental modifications to the schemes implemented by the Central Government).
- The Governments (both at the central and state level) are not adequately involving Civil Society Organizations and other community structures to ensure effective implementation of schemes.
- While demand for water is growing, the quality of water is dwindling. Groundwater levels are also decreasing due to over exploitation by drilling borewells for irrigation and other allied activities.
- Inadequate investments to meet both capital requirements as well as Operation and Maintenance (O&M) have led to incomplete and/ or defunct WASH systems.
- Excessive dependence on ground water, which is seriously compromising long term water security and water quality.
- Functionality and usage of toilets is still prevalent and this has led to slippage from open-defecation free (ODF) status. Behavioural change is a key component toward achieving safe sanitation; however, this not been fully mainstreamed under SBM.
- Though the Government of India is claiming that there is significant progress being made, experts, several researchers and other relevant stakeholders have raised doubts over the credibility of the data, particularly on ODF data. The 51st report by the Standing Committee on Rural Development had recommended removing the number of defunct toilets from the data stating that it *“does not reveal a real picture of ODF until and unless the coverage data and usage data in regard to the functional toilets are same”* (<https://www.prsindia.org/report-summaries/swachh-bharat-mission-gramin-states-uts>).
- Water quality has to be improved by reducing pollution (SDG 6.3) by 2030. For cleaning the river, allocation of funds under Namami Gange (Rs 800 crore) for Ganga cleaning and National River conservation (Rs 840 crore) for cleaning other rivers, has been made during 2020-21. SDG 6.6 mandates protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems such as wetlands, rivers, aquifers. These two programmes address this aspect as well.

- India's water use efficiency in all sectors is not satisfactory. For example, India's water use is highest in the irrigation sector (80%) and its efficiency is only 38%. To address the improvement of the efficiency, PMKSY ('per drop more crop') scheme was launched in 2015 using micro-irrigation technology. India's potential for micro-irrigation is an area of 70 million hectares and the achievement till 2018 is only 9 million hectares. PMKSY is a centrally sponsored scheme and meaningful participation of GPs is essential. Budget 2020-21 allocated Rs 4,000 crore, which is almost double the RE 2019-2020 amount and is substantial.
- In India, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act clearly stipulates that Gram Panchayats are empowered to function as institutions of self-government at the village level. The functions of a GP are also mentioned in the 11<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Constitution of India, which consist of the provision of basic services and maintenance of public goods — street lighting, sanitation, village commons, and water supply etc. However, in many states the line ministries and even the districts have not worked in a proactive manner in engaging with the GPs and ascertaining the ground realities, when major flagship initiatives are implemented. Without their active participation in the planning and implementation processes, it is inconceivable that these schemes can be sustained and managed by the community. The capacity of the various functionaries working at the GP level could be strengthened.

## **1.2 Leadership, Governance and Institutional Mechanisms for SDG 6:**

Institutional mechanisms for providing strategic and operational direction for SDGs are in place. The National Institute for Transforming India Aayog (Niti Aayog), is the apex level body under the Prime Minister that takes the lead in policy planning and acts as the nodal agency for driving SDGs in India. This section provides an overview and, in the process, also highlights the key achievements and challenges.

Since its inception in 2015, Niti Aayog has carried out an extensive mapping of the key schemes and other initiatives at the central level. Thereafter, these schemes were linked to the respective SDGs. NITI Aayog has constituted a Task Force with participation by Central and State Ministries for regular review of SDG implementation in the country. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has developed a measurement framework for tracking/monitoring the progress of nationally defined SDGs and is placed in the public domain for wider consultation.

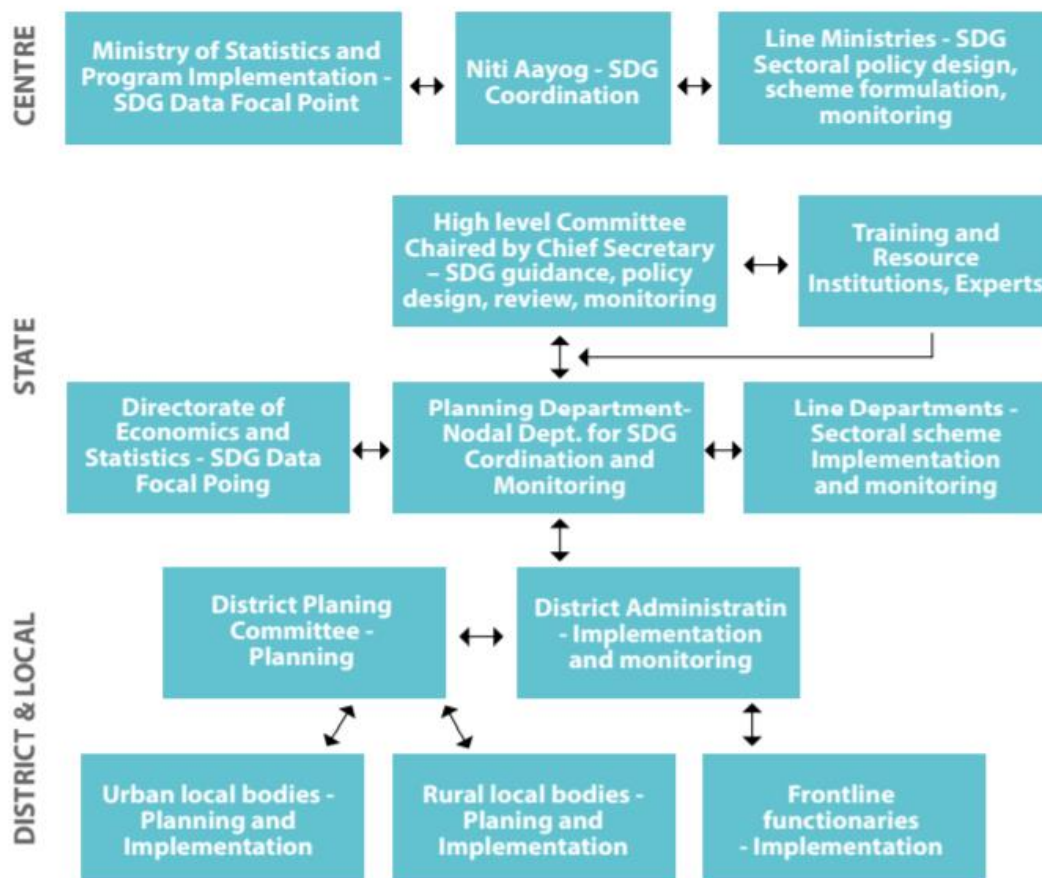
In a similar vein, several state governments have also carried out mapping exercises, identified the key schemes and linked them to appropriate schemes. Till date, 23 states and Union Territories have prepared their vision documents that are based on the SDGs; however Civil Society Organisations have stated that they have not been consulted in preparing the document and some states have not put this document out for discussion. Some states have also established "SDG Cells" to act as the nodal agency for implementing SDGs and developing their strategies. In this context, states like Punjab and Jharkhand have claimed they are involving all the departments (Whole of Government Approach).

However, in reality there is very little coordination between centre and states. Within states, there is no coordination between departments and clearly the "Whole of

Government Approach" is lacking. It is important to note that some of the states have not developed the State Indicator Framework, which could complement the work of MoSPI at the national level, and that in the absence of this framework there could be issues on data quality.

However, Niti Aayog is stating that they are working with the states to take stock of the progress on the various schemes and tracking indicators, and that the states are providing timely updates. The diagram below is an illustration of the current accountability mechanism for SDGs at the national and state levels (source: Bharat, Girija; Dkhar, Nathaniel B and Abraham, Mary. 2020. Aligning India's Sanitation Policies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), TERI Discussion Paper). It is also important to note that while the lower tier institutions are not fully involved in the SDG mechanism at this stage, Niti Aayog is stating that over the next few years, they will make a concerted effort to involve district, urban and rural bodies in the process. Some states like Kerala have made some tentative moves in this direction, but there is scope for improvement.

### How India is delivering on the SDGs



## 2. Country Reporting of SDG 6:

### 2.1 Incorporation of the 2030 agenda into national and state frameworks and policies (SDG 6 Measurement/Index):

As noted in the previous sections, Niti Aayog has carried out an extensive mapping of existing schemes and programmes in conjunction with the relevant Ministries and Departments. Subsequently Niti Aayog has also developed the road map and vision document. To monitor SDGs and its associated targets, a National Indicator Framework, comprising 306 indicators has been developed by MoSPI. While Niti Aayog and MoSPI are stating that these indicators have been finalised, line ministries are still carrying out modifications. However, it is not clear when this will be approved by the legislature.

Furthermore, Niti Aayog (with UNDP) developed an SDG Index Baseline Report (composite index consisting of 62 indicators across 14 SDGs, including SDG 6) in 2018. In December 2019, Niti Aayog released the second edition of SDG Index which comprehensively documented the progress made by all states and union territories towards achieving the 2030 SDG targets. When the report was launched, Niti Aayog, UN India and WASH Experts working with the Government stated that the SDG India Index 2019 is **more robust** on account of wider coverage of goals, targets, and indicators with greater alignment to the National Indicator Framework. In fact, the UN Resident Coordinator also stated that India was the first country to develop an index of this type, since it has included the states (sub-national level). However, it is important to note that at this juncture, this framework is not covering district and lower tier local government institutions. This is a major gap.

The key features of the SDG Index are as follows:

- The SDG India Index was developed by NITI Aayog in collaboration with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Global Green Growth Institute and United Nations in India. NITI Aayog has the twin mandate to oversee the implementation of SDGs in the country, and also promote Competitive and Cooperative Federalism among States and UTs. The SDG India Index acts as a bridge between these mandates.
- A composite score was computed between the range of 0-100 for each State and Union Territories (UTs) based on their aggregate performance across 13 SDGs, which indicates average performance of State/UT towards achieving 13 SDGs and their respective targets. If a State/UT achieves a score of 100, it signifies that it has achieved the 2030 national targets. Key highlights are as follows:
  - Himachal Pradesh ranks high on providing clean water and sanitation, in reducing inequalities and preserving mountain ecosystem.
  - Kerala's top rank is attributed to its superior performance in providing good health, reducing hunger, achieving gender equality and providing quality education.
  - Chandigarh leads because of its exemplary performance in providing clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, generating decent work/economic growth and providing quality education.

For SDG Index baseline report (2018), the overall national index score for SDG 6 was recorded as 63 and the score for each of the selected indicators is as follows (source: Report on Leave no One Behind, Consultation on the Contribution of Swachh Bharat towards achieving SDG 6 for those furthest Behind, FANSA, 2019).

#	Indicator selected for SDG 6 India Index	National Target 2030	Achievement December 2018
1	Percentage of population having safe and adequate drinking water in rural areas	100	71.8%
2	Percentage of rural households with individual household toilets	100	82.72%
3	Percentage of districts verified to be open defecation free	100	32%
4	Installed sewerage treatment capacity as a proportion of sewerage generated in urban areas	68.79	37.58%
5	Percentage of annual ground water withdrawal against net annual availability	70	62%

In a similar vein, the SDG Index Report (2019) identified seven national indicators to measure India's performance towards the goal of clean water and sanitation, which captures four of eight SDG global targets under this goal. The overall performance score of India for SDG 6 was recorded as 88. The indicator wise percentage of achievement is as follows (see table below).

#	National Indicator selected for SDG 6	National Target 2030	Achievement December 2019	NFHS 4 2015-16
1	Percentage of households having improved sources of drinking water	100	95.5%	89.9%
2	Percentage of Rural households with individual household toilets	100	100%	36.7.7%
3	Percentage of urban households with individual household toilets	100	97.2%	48.4%
4	Percentage of districts verified to be 100% ODF	100	90.7%	
5	Proportion of Schools with separate toilet facility for girls	100	97.43%	
6	Percentage of Industries (17 categories of highly polluting industries/grossly polluting/red category industries) with waste water treatment facility as per the CPCB norms	100	87.625%	
7	Percentage of Blocks that over exploited the ground water table	-	18.01%	

The fourth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS 4), conducted in the year 2015-06 also provides estimates of some basic household amenities. By 2030, India wishes to provide drinking water to all households. India's achievement so far is encouraging as the NFHD 4 report estimated that 90% of the households have

improved sources of drinking water. Improved sources of drinking water implies piped water into dwelling/yard/plot, public tap/standpipe, tube well or borehole, protected dug well, protected spring, rainwater, or community RO plant. Similarly, India has aimed at ensuring that each household should have improved toilet facilities in their respective household. Again, improved toilet facilities means flush to piped sewer system, flush to septic tank, flush to pit latrine, ventilated improved pit (VIP)/biogas latrine, pit latrine with slab, or twin pit/composting toilet, which is not shared with any other household. The NFHS 4 estimated that only 37% households in the rural areas have improved toilet facilities. On the other hand, the percentage of improved toilet facilities is 48% in the urban households. It may be concluded that it appears that India will achieve the target of improved source of drinking water. However, India has to make greater efforts to achieve the target of improved toilet facility to both rural and urban areas.

In summary, UN India and other observers have noted that the Index can be readily accessed by non-specialists and is therefore useful for CSOs, research agencies and other relevant stakeholders. It has also established progress against different goals and targets and has clearly delineated the roles and responsibilities of the different line departments/ministries.

Though Niti Aayog deserves praise for developing the SDG Index, there are nevertheless some significant weaknesses with the SDG Index and they are as follows:

- **LNOB not addressed:** The SDG Index has not sufficiently highlighted LNOB issues and specifically the emphasis on eliminating disparities and empowering the poorest and hardest to reach. This has emerged as a major gap.
- **Ensuring data consistency:** Niti Aayog admitted that data for a few States and UTs is not available for some of the indicators. Experts have stated that this could prove to be problematic when computing the Index, since these missing/null values have not been given any weightage. Therefore, this could have a bearing on the methodology.
- **Defining Indicators:** The erstwhile planning commission and even Niti Aayog have not been very successful in setting relevant indicators to measure outcomes. For instance, India's definition of "safe" drinking water (with hand pumps and tube wells considered as safe as piped water supply) is a source of concern, since the number of waterborne diseases and deaths due to diarrhoea clearly indicate otherwise. Likewise, quality education has not successfully been defined. The indicators should be clearly defined, not just by experts at the national and state level, but preferably in conjunction with key functionaries at the district/GP levels also. If states are expected to play a pivotal role (giving the devolution post 14th Finance Commission), it will require ownership not just nationally, but also at the state and local levels.
- **Measuring Progress:** It is not clear how Niti Aayog and the state governments are using the SDG index for developing long term inception plans and refining existing interventions, especially in the absence of data at the local levels. Some states like Karnataka have also demanded changes to be made to the scores. Notwithstanding this, SDG cells established at the state level will only consider using this as a management tool if there is ownership for this at the state level, otherwise state governments may provide the information just to placate Niti Aayog and in

the process data quality and reliability could be seriously compromised. At this juncture, the efforts are largely occurring in Silos, with little harmonisation across initiatives, which could result in inefficiencies.

- **Non-involvement of CSOs:** The involvement of CSOs in developing and implementing the SDG Index has been marginal and some would even argue that this is merely tokenistic. The Government could perhaps work in coordination with Civil Society Organisations in carrying out qualitative assessments, capacity building initiatives and even in carrying out data quality auditing. This will help in ensuring that the data is transparent and authentic.

The establishment of the SDG Index is a major milestone and a step in the right direction, but it is very clear that there have to be further improvements in refining the indicators, enhancing data collection and reporting processes.

### **3.2 India's tryst with VNR:**

The Government of India submitted its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) to United Nations in 2017. It should be noted that though VNR guidelines had highlighted the need to report on progress and status of all SDGs, India only reported on seven goals. SDG 6 was not included in the 2017 VNR report. In hindsight, it is very clear that during the preparation of the first VNR report, the Government of India and in particular Niti Aayog did not fully involve the state government, individual line ministries and civil society organisations.

An umbrella of Indian civil society organizations, including some representing marginalized and minority groups, led by the Wada Na Todo Abhiyan presented the shadow report in 2017. The thrust of this report was the need for LNOB and they made the pitch that this aspect has been completely missed out in the Government VNR. Another novelty of the alternative report is that additional SDGs were included, including SDG 6.

However, since 2017 there has been some progress in involving CSOs for preparing the 2019 VNR report. In this context, it is important to note that Niti Aayog has established a "VNR Advisory Board", consisting of the following agencies to provide inputs:

- NITI Aayog
- Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)
- Ministry of Finance (MoF)
- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)
- National Institute for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD)
- United Nations Development Programme
- Confederation of Indian Industries (CII)
- National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP)
- Research and Information Systems for Developing Countries (RIS)
- National Institute of Urban Affairs
- Global Green Growth Institute

- Selective CSO partners, such as WNTA

It is important to note that the VNR advisory board has met three times between September 2019 and March 2020. In addition to this, Niti Aayog has established a Task Force consisting of experts in various domains, including WASH experts, however Niti Aayog has not provided details on the composition and profile of the taskforce. As part of this process, it is envisaged that the VNR taskforce will be at some point over the next few months carrying out extensive consultations with civil society groups to develop a consensus on the VNR report. It is expected that as part of this process, NGOs working on WASH issues will be included to articulate the progress on SDG 6. It is envisioned that in July 2020 India will present its second VNR on SDGs 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12 at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. However, due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is possible that the entire process and report preparation could be disrupted and could be delayed.

However it is clear that based on the preparatory process for the 2017 VNR , Niti Aayog is focusing on the SDGs per se and has thus far failed to clearly articulate how the broader 2030 agenda is being taken forward and the transformations that could be achieved over the long haul, especially in reaching out to the LNOB groups with an equitable and inclusive processes.

## 1. Accountability Mechanisms, Platforms or Systems:

The previous sections outlined the accountability mechanisms at the national level, so this section will be focusing more on the mechanisms at the state level. However, the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development cannot be achieved without examining the accountability mechanisms at the state level. This section, provides a brief summary on how India is potentially taking forward the accountability systems in selected states <sup>3</sup>:

- **Bihar:** The Government of Bihar is implementing a number of converging programmes to address all SDGs. The Government of Bihar has established a specific SDG Cell/unit. Since 2018, the unit/cell has taken the lead in developing a vision/roadmap. An umbrella programme called Nischay seeks to address the challenges in multiple sectors following an inter-sectoral approach. The objective of the programme is to implement interventions with a holistic vision of achieving the sustainable development targets.
- **Uttarakhand:** The state has formed an SDG Cell in 2018. The SDG cell has developed the roadmap after carrying out an assessment of existing schemes. In addition to this, the state has made amendments to the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) in order to integrate the SDGs in the GPDPs. A pool of master trainers for imparting training to PRIs for alignment of GPDP with the SDGs has been created. One of the main focus areas for alignment of SDGs in GP Development Plan is taking forward strengthening sanitation initiatives at the GP level.
- **Jharkhand:** Like Bihar and Uttarakhand, the Government of Jharkhand has also established an SDG Cell. This cell has mapped the existing schemes and developed an SDG roadmap. Several training initiatives have been carried out for PRIs by state training institutions, specifically on aspects regarding convergence of nutrition/sanitation and hygiene schemes.
- **Delhi:** Government of Delhi has also established an SDG Cell. After carrying out a mapping of schemes, they have also apportioned the funds required for achieving SDGs. They are in the process of preparing a monitoring framework.
- Similar mechanisms have also been established in Sikkim, Telangana, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and other states.

Work at the state level is still an ongoing progress and there is a long way to go before the accountability mechanisms are firmed up. At this juncture, the biggest gap is that district, rural and urban level GP functionaries are not involved in this process. Perhaps, there is scope for Government of India (GOI) to establish a mechanism similar to Good and Services Tax Council, where the Central and State Governments can really take forward the entire SDG framework. This will be in line with the PM's Vision of Cooperative Federalism. If this is considered, perhaps India could showcase to the rest of the world that the 2030 agenda is underpinned by an institutional mechanism that embraces the diversity of the country. Perhaps this will also provide the necessary impetus for the state governments to dedicate resources to the SDG agenda, and could provide the ambience for state functionaries to feel that their participation is not just tokenistic, but is on par with the key institutions in Delhi.

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<sup>3</sup> Bharat, Girija; Dkhar, Nathaniel B and Abraham, Mary. 2020. Aligning India's Sanitation Policies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), TERI Discussion Paper (see page 31); Niti Aayog PPT (2018), Meeting with States: Improving SDGs.

## 2. Civil Society Organisation's Participation in Accountability Mechanisms, Platforms or Systems (list of Civil Society contacted for this study provided in appendix 3):

### 5.1 Stakeholder Engagement:

Civil society Organisations (CSOs) are participating in a number of meetings/consultations being organised by Niti Aayog, line ministries and state governments (the list of CSOs consulted is provided in Annex 4). At the national level, Civil Society Organisations perceive that while they are invited for key events and workshops, their suggestions and feedback are not fully incorporated. CSOs are diffident of providing critical feedback, since they feel that the government may not invite them for future events. Some of the International NGOs, such as Plan, Save and WaterAid had more opportunities to establish this rapport than national NGOs. Some of the grassroots NGOs have stated that they probably feel that there is more scope for collaboration at the state level.

However, WNTA mentioned that there has been perceptible change since 2017 VNR was prepared. WNTA now feels that for the preparation of the 2019 VNR, Niti Aayog had consulted them and even incorporated their suggestions. WNTA felt that this could perhaps be attributed to the fact that they have come out with several research studies on SDGs, which may have prompted Niti Aayog to invite WNTA and other CSOs. But at the national level, there are no structured mechanisms for CSOs to be included.

However, several CSOs stated that state governments have been keen to engage with Civil Society. Samarthan (national NGO), working in several Central Indian States like MP and Chhattisgarh mentioned that the SDG Cell in MP organised a couple of meetings related to SDGs to which Samarthan and other organisations were invited. However, these meetings are very sporadic and there is scope for institutionalising these mechanisms, taking into account that organisations like Samarthan are working with the line ministries on implementing various WASH related initiatives, including developing and implementing social audit tools.

However, it is also clear that many INGOs and NGOs have **not** fully embraced the SDG agenda in practice, particularly in establishing how this is intricately linked to their Country Strategy, Advocacy/Communication Policy or M&E Plans. This has emerged as a major gap. CSOs could be better placed to influence the Government, if they can develop viable models, instead of being reactive to the Government's SDG Index or VNR processes. For example, there is scope for organisations like Samarthan, who are working closely with the state/district government functionaries in not only implementing WASH initiatives but also in carrying out social audits. This entire mechanism, including the social audit tools could be used for SDG reporting. In the process, with some innovations they could even involve beneficiaries and develop an SDG reporting process from the grassroots. Similarly, WaterAid has developed a dashboard, which is being used for reporting on Key Performance Indicators, which will eventually be reported by state teams and partners. Over the next few months, WaterAid will be revising their Country Strategic Plan. There is a case for WaterAid to modify the dashboard and ensure that all their interventions are linked to SDGs.

If the Civil Society Organisations can establish these mechanisms, they could even make sure that the alternate VNR, which CSOs will be developing is underpinned by implementation science models and evidence-based M&E systems (and not just based

on perceptions/impressions). FANSA/WNTA could perhaps take the lead in ensuring that Civil Society Organisations come up with a few common indicators, which could be used for the VNR and other platforms/systems.

In summary, while the CSOs should advocate and influence the Government to be more collaborative and work closely with them on the SDG 2030 Agenda, it is equally important for CSOs to walk the talk on the SDG agenda, by developing and showcasing the pathways.

## **5.2 Update on LNOB: How are CSOs taking this agenda forward?**

Wada Na Todo Abhiyan (WNTA) came out in 2019 with a publication “Multiple Challenges of Marginalised Communities in Achieving SDGs: A Civil Society Review of SDGs in India”, the report clearly stated that the “aspirations and concerns of the most marginalised sections of society: Dalits, Adivasis, Nomadic Tribes, Minorities, Sexual Minorities and other groups are excluded from the various schemes/policies of Government. The report states that the Government has failed to provide “SDGs a human face” (page 2). The report recommended the need for the Government to create a platform for dialogue between Civil Society and the Government on developing an inclusive agenda on SDGs. The report also recommended that the SDG reporting by Niti Aayog should be “informed by the multiple layers of vulnerability, which could include economic, social, gender, caste and minority identities”.

While WNTA is right to critique the government on the LNOB, there is another reality that is important to also acknowledge: that while CSOs are citing that they are working with children, youth, women and elderly people as the groups being left behind, the CSOs in many cases have failed to provide a detailed account of how this is being accomplished. CSOs are merely highlighting their existing strategies and approaches, but they have not demonstrated how LNOB is being translated into action and report on outcomes based on these efforts. Again, this is not emerging in the dashboards, project evaluations and other related processes and systems. This could be attributed to several factors: while data is available on universal sanitation and water coverage, aggregated official data are not available on the specific services being provided for marginalised groups (girls, women, transgenders, people with disabilities, elderly etc).

Some of the efforts being made by CSO on achieving LNOB are as follows (the case studies below are provided by various CSOs):

- Modern Architects for Rural India (MARI), Tata Trust and Krishna District (Andhra Pradesh) set up a revolving fund to build toilets for the poor, provided technical assistance and promoted demand and behaviour change, facilitating access to household toilet by 8510 families.
- Working with Gram Panchayats, Self Help Groups and local officials, MARI built child friendly toilets and promoted Primary and High Schools students' clubs on sound WASH and MHM practices in tribal areas of Warangal District.
- Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE) designed community toilets for people with disabilities, specifically for the 70 households residing in Leprosy colony (Odisha). The design was designed in coordination with the community and adhered to the universal guidelines for people with disabilities. Installation of side bars, handle, anti-skid floor tiles, proper ramps, special taps for people with

disabilities were designed and installed. The design was subsequently taken up by the municipal authorities for replication in another 4 urban localities. The unique features of this initiative were that the community was actively involved from the very outset of the programme, keeping in mind their needs/requirements. Cure India also managed to take this as an advocacy initiative, ensuring that the Government can replicate this elsewhere and that dedicated financial resources are allocated.

- Action for Food Production (AFPRO), worked with tribal communities in Chhattisgarh Mahasamund block to address the adverse impacts of climate change by working on following issues: conservation and management of surface water, resources and adopting climate resilient practices. AFPRO staff from the very outset established a rapport between PRI officials, district staff and Self-Help Groups in the block. Nearly 2000 tribal communities benefited from this initiative.
- Samarthan, is currently working in MP and Chhattisgarh on a variety of thematic issues, including WASH. One of the major thrusts is to carry out social audits through beneficiaries. Samarthan has worked with tribal communities, women and other vulnerable groups on carrying out social audits, including training and data collection aspects.
- WaterAid: The Country Strategy has clearly emphasised the need for reaching out to marginalised communities, such as tribal communities. To harmonise measurement efforts and improve the quality of interventions, a dashboard has been established. LNOB issues are also reviewed when CSP baseline, midline and end line evaluations are carried out.

There are several challenges in taking forward the LNOB agenda. The task is large, but without agreement among CSOs, our efforts to address these issues are likely to be inefficient and ineffective and, in the process, may jeopardise the prospects for India to achieve SDG goals.

Going forward we could perhaps address LNOB proactively, if we can address the following issues:

- Do CSOs have the LNOB strategy in place that could address the needs of those being left behind, and more importantly is this understood by all the staff, especially the programme implementation teams enforcing this strategy?
- Are CSOs willing to undertake research studies/audits/reviews to identify those at the risk of being left behind and can they link these frameworks to SDG reporting mechanisms – and in the process demonstrate to the Government a scalable and replicable model?
- Are they willing to invest financial resource to ensure that LNOB is taken forward proactively, without merely addressing it at a rhetorical level?

### **3. Positive Experiences of Participation in SDG Processes:**

One of the recurring themes from the previous report in 2018 (CSO Review of National Accountability Mechanisms for SDG 6: India Report) is that smaller NGOs, working away from Delhi are not engaging with Central level ministries. This has emerged as an issue once again. But they have been able to make headway in engaging with the state government and PRIs, particularly at a time with greater resources being allocated to the state governments under the 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission. However, although the state governments have greater financial resources at their disposal, states like Chhattisgarh and MP have not invested in WASH but are merely piggybacking on WASH initiatives/Centrally Sponsored Schemes being implemented by the Central Government. For the larger NGOs (particularly INGOs) it is very clear that while they have forged partnerships with the line ministries, establishing the same links with Niti Aayog has been difficult.

By and large NGOs are diffident about commenting on the specific initiatives being implemented by GOI in areas such as the SDG Index or the pathways that could be pursued for developing VNR, due to the fear that the present Government is very sensitive to any suggestion that SBM may not be fully effective. This should be seen from another perspective also, since there is a great deal of commentary in the media about the credibility of the datasets. CSOs, particularly those working in the so-called aspirational districts have mentioned that District Officials are prickly about datasets being disseminated at the national level.

Nevertheless, there are some positive experiences that could be encouraging. WNTA stated that Niti Aayog has been more accommodative in accepting solutions from CSOs during the preparation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR report, which is in marked contrast to the roadblocks that CSOs faced in 2017. The other positive features, which are emerging are that in education, health and other themes, state governments are more receptive in working with CSOs. Pratham for example is working closely with state governments in ensuring that their models can be integrated with SDG tracking, although these initiatives are proceeding at a glacial pace. Pratham staff mentioned that this could be due to the fact that Pratham's ASER report is widely covered in the media and considered as a "gold standard". It is interesting to note that from their vantage point they felt that it is probably better to influence the state government rather than Niti Aayog or Central Ministries. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned from these initiatives for CSOs working the WASH sector.

#### **4. Areas of Improvement for Strengthening Accountability to track SDGs:**

As mentioned in the previous sections, India is slowly establishing the institutional mechanisms for tracking SDGs, however there are several challenges and they are as follows:

- At the central government level, there is scope for greater synergy between the individual line ministries, Niti Aayog and CSOs. It is inconceivable for India to establish viable and sustainable mechanisms with ensuring greater coordination amongst the major development partners, particularly as Niti Aayog is espousing plans for involving lower tier institutions.
- Datasets are being formulated by Niti Aayog and MoSPI, without actively involving the concerned stakeholders from the very outset. State governments, line ministries and CSOs needs to be co-partners in the process and if they are passive partners, the ownership for taking this process over the long haul could be seriously compromised.
- While State Government have established SDG Cells, there is scope for finessing the process by ensuring that lower tier institutions and CSOs are also involved. Given India's diversity, it is impossible for the entire SDG ecosystem to flourish, with active involvement of municipal and PRIs in this process.

India is making incremental progress in establishing the governance and institutional mechanisms, policies and means of implementation. Some areas that could be considered for strengthening the overall processes and mechanisms are as follows:

- Institutional mechanisms for implementation and coordination of SDGs at the national level are slowly being institutionalised, but there is scope for GOI to consider establishing formal processes and systems to ensure that CSOs to contribute to this process. At this stage, the meetings/consultations are being held in a very ad-hoc manner. In a similar vein, there is scope for improvement in how the state governments are being engaged in the entire implementation mechanism. The Government could consider the feasibility of establishing a mechanism similar to the GST Council and ensuring that the state government can take ownership of the 2030 agenda, in the process ensuring that cooperative federalism is implemented.
- Involvement of lower tier institutions, specifically the district, municipal and rural government structures for ensuring that the 2030 agenda is not a top-down model. This is crucial for ensuring that we have transparent processes for data collection systems, especially when we are collecting data on gender and other aspects on LNOB.
- Hopefully India has learned lessons from the shortcomings of the preparatory processes for the 2017 VNR. But it is important that Niti Aayog should not focus on SDGs per se, but should look at the transformation across the various themes, particularly in areas such as LNOB. The 2017 VNR had serious gaps when several SDGs including SDG 6 were not included, hopefully the 2019 will be all embracing.
- India needs to demonstrate (not only the Government, but also civil society and other relevant stakeholders) how the LNOB agenda is being translated into action and we should report this integrate this in our reporting systems, including the SDG Index.

- India should consider developing costed 2030 agenda implementation plan, so that the government can develop long term inception plans, with clear financial budgets earmarked for the various schemes, which will enable Niti Aayog, Central Ministries and State Government to develop long term inception plans.
- Civil Society Organisations have made very little progress in developing measurement and reporting systems for SDGs. At this juncture, while CSOs have developed viable M&E systems, this is not explicitly linked to SDGs. This is an area that needs to be looked into by CSOs and perhaps organisations like FANSA could facilitate this process. But this can only be done if Niti Aayog can include Civil Society Organisations in taking forward the various mechanisms in the task force and other forums. Moreover, Civil Society Organisations could help in rolling out social audit tools, community score cards and other participatory tools, which could help in strengthening the overall M&E system and in the process perhaps authenticating the data.

**The table summarises the key changes since the last report was prepared:**

Topics	2018 Report	2019 Report
Structured Accountability Mechanisms	The 2018 Report stated that cohesive accountability mechanism needs to be established by the Government (state and Central), spelling out formal mechanisms for CSOs and other stakeholders. The report perceived this was a very weak area.	There is some progress since 2018. WNTA and other CSOs have confirmed that they have participated in various consultations/meetings as part of the preparatory process for VNR report. CSOs working in some of the states have also stated that state governments are more accommodative. However, the formal mechanism is not fully established and this could change, particularly in the case of Niti Aayog, if there is a change of bureaucrats, particularly in top positions.
National Indicator Framework and formal accountability mechanisms	The 2018 report stated that national indicators and accountability frameworks for SDGs have not been finalised.	The NIF framework has been established across all SDGs. Some State Government are currently developing their frameworks and even linking it to GDPs.

#### **5. Good Accountability Practices (India and Global):**

The following best practices could be replicated by the Government and CSOs:

- 1) **The 100 hotspots: Snapshots of Socially Excluded and Vulnerable Population Groups & SDGs in India, June 2019, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan:**

This publication by WNTA highlighted that the most vulnerable population groups across India faced significant barriers and challenges. The report through various case studies highlighted the specific provision/schemes that could enable these groups to benefit from the 2030 SDG Agenda.

## 2) **Empowerment in WASH Index: Stockholm Environment Institute, 2019**

The Empowerment in WASH Index is a new survey-based tool to measure women's empowerment and gender outcomes in the WASH sector. The Empowerment in Wash Index (EWI) measures agency, participation and empowerment in the water and sanitation sector. The Index is made up of indicators to assess empowerment in relation to WASH roles and responsibilities as well as broader society. Data on each indicator is collected using a survey that targets both male and female decision-makers in households. The indicators address empowerment at individual, household and community levels, as described below:

- **Individual level:** Because personal values and attitudes inform agency, this indicator assesses whether respondents believe they could make their own decisions if they wanted to, regardless of who currently makes household decisions. Assessment at this level focuses on domestic water collection and management, expenditures, and participation outside the household.
- **Household level:** Empowerment at the household level includes indicators focused on instrumental agency, relating to power to make decisions on WASH roles and responsibilities, expenditures, and participation in community activities. Other indicators assess control of assets and workload, which influence ability to participate in decision making or achieve desired goals. Indicators also measure access to WASH-related information and sharing of that information within the household, such as information on citizens' rights to WASH services.
- **Community level:** Water and sanitation interventions are often designed and managed with community input, so participation in these activities can influence their outcomes. EWI indicators address whether respondents feel comfortable speaking up in public on implementation of WASH services, or to make complaints to local leaders or authorities about services. Group membership is also assessed; that is, the extent to which people are involved in community associations.

This tool is currently being used in several countries.

## **6. Conclusion:**

This report has highlighted the key developments since the last report was prepared in 2018. There is little doubt that there have been significant achievements, but the report has also highlighted the gaps/inadequacies, which could impede India from fulfilling the 2030 SDG agenda cohesively. While the onus rests with the government to be more inclusive and transparent, it is equally important for CSOs to be -proactive and truly embrace the 2030 Agenda, especially in taking forward the LNOB agenda and developing the models for measuring SDG performance for their interventions.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix-1: Methodology**

In-country data collection in the following order:

1. Develop Questionnaire
2. Review secondary data
3. Conducted in-depth discussion with key government functionaries (Central and State), UN Agencies, Civil Society Organisations, Research Institutes
4. Draw up a summary report on the findings.
5. Develop report based on the findings

### **Appendix-2: Questionnaire**

#### **India - CSO Review of National Accountability Mechanisms for SDG 6: Questionnaire**

##### **1. Key issues to be probed with Niti Aayog are as follows:**

- While a multi-disciplinary task force has been established - how often has this body met?
- Who are the members of this task force? How do you see this body evolving and what are the key lessons learned?
- Do you envisage a role for CSOs in this taskforce?
- What are the key decisions taken by the multi-disciplinary taskforce?
- How are other departments and state government engaged in this taskforce?
- Has a vision document been developed?
- Niti Aayog was planning to develop a roadmap? Is this road map ready? If it is not ready, when will this be developed? How will CSOs/ministries/state governments be involved in the process?
- How have the states progressed in developing such road maps? Which state, what progress; does NA suggest any State as a model that can be documented for this study?
- What is the role for non-govt stakeholders in this process that the NA recommends to the States? Any CSO that has been involved closely at Centre/State level?
- How was the SDG India Index developed? How were the various departments and state government involved?
- What role do you envisage for CSO in these exercises? Is there a roadmap, which has been developed?
- MOSPI is tasked with the responsibility of coordinating various tasks, especially in developing National Indicator Framework – how is this coming along from NA's

perspective? What can be done to ensure that the views of central government ministries and state governments are fully incorporated in the process?

- In your view, what has been the progress in firming up the institutional mechanism for monitoring and fixing accountability related to progress on SDG 6 and has the various departments working on SDG 6 collaborated? What are the lessons that can be learned from collecting data on other SDGs – and what can be done to strengthen the institutional mechanisms for SDG 6 and specifically in mapping exercises?
- What are the implications of the recent reforms in the WASH sector – such as the formation for JSA?
- Changes in financing and budget allocations for the WASH sector – what are the implications?
- With greater funds being allocated for the states under the 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission – even though there is significant shortfall for the social sector due to the current economic recession? What are the policy implications of this?
- Ministry of Finance and State Governments are yet to integrate SDG related financial resources in national budgeting for implementing SDGs – implications, risk and how does Niti Aayog this could be addressed over the long haul.
- NA is working with several development partners in the aspirational districts – are these partners collecting data as per the systems/processes developed by NA? If this is happening, what are the lessons that could be learned for scaling up the model?
- What is the progress on other SDGs – are there lessons that could be discerned for improving the mechanisms/processes for mapping changes for SDG 6 and institutionalising the structure.
- Key impressions from the VNR process? What has been the general impression so far from the consultations held for VNR?
- What are the key steps for achieving the LNOB objective?
- How has the NA planned to disseminate the proposed Indicator framework, Accountability mechanism, roadmap etc? Any trainings/sensitisations planned? modules developed? How is this being rolled out?

## 2. Issues to be probed with Ministries/Departments (Central Government)

- Collaboration with NA in taking forward the following aspects (to assess the process and outcomes):
- Multi-disciplinary Taskforce – it seems departments concerned with SDG goal 3 were not involved in the task force, is that the case for SDG 6 also?
- Road Map
- Vision Document
- SDG India Index – was the development of the Index useful for the Ministry (decision making, programme implementation and more generally in assessing progress on SDGs).
- What are the implications of the recent reforms in the WASH sector (e.g. JSA)?
- Implications of the recent budget – for instance the allocation for Swachh Bharat Mission Gramin [SBM(G)] was unchanged from the previous budget, at Rs 9,994 crore. Funds for Swachh Bharat Mission Urban, however, were reduced by Rs 350 crore to Rs 2,300 crore. The allocation for the overall Jal Jeevan Mission, which seeks to provide piped water across the country, is Rs 11,500 crore, up from Rs 10,000 crore in 2019-20.
- What are the institutional measures being enunciated for rolling out SDG 6
- What are the Strategy documents that you have developed?
- What are the nodal structures?
- Have you mapped the targets?
- Have you carried out any capacity building initiatives for implementing, monitoring and evaluation?
- Have you worked with the state governments in formulating State-specific Indicators and orienting budgets with SDGs?
- Is there duplication with MOSPI?
- Are indicators for SDG 6 being captured by your department? Are datasets available? If so, how is this being captured – is it in sync with MOSPI's NIF?
- Coordination mechanism with the States - in measuring and validating progress? States have now been ranked as per SDG progress, but there have been disagreements from the states. Have the Indicator Framework been worked out and disseminated?
- How is the progress on the LNOB objective? How are the marginalised sections being covered? Any specific plans for ensuring LNOB?
- What has been the ministry's involvement in the VNR?

### **3. Ascertaining the mechanisms at the state level (Punjab, Haryana and Delhi)**

- Has state government appointed nodal officers/departments for coordinating and rolling out SDG 6. Specific issues to be probed:
- How do they function – are there sectoral groups/taskforces or other mechanisms to coordinate activities at the states level?
- Have the roles and responsibilities of these nodal officers/departments been specified? How do you overcome departmental silos?
- Have you carried awareness exercises – as requested by NA?
- Are CSO involved in the roll out of SDG 6?
- Recently NA had requested state governments to develop their specific state plans (vision, Strategy and Mapping)– what is the status on this?
- How are the CSOs and Non-Govt stakeholders being involved in this Vision exercise and in M-E?
- Any training/Orientation on SDGs esp SDG 6 proposed/undertaken for the dept staff and other stakeholders?
- Have these plans been submitted to the NA and other line departments at the national level?

### **4. Assessing the Involvement of UN agencies, CSOs/Research Institutes in the SDG 6 accountability mechanisms and rollout**

- Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDG 6, has your organization taken (or will it take) any decisions or new strategies to guide the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs? If any, please provide the details – including details:
- How has been included in your Country Strategic Plan and implementation of WASH initiatives?
- Are the SDG indicators/targets linked with your M&E systems – linked to indicators for specific WASH projects.
- How has your organization engaged with stakeholder groups, both in supporting implementation, and within your own organization? If yes, please provide main highlights, including any lessons learned.
- How do you report on SDG progress?
- Please provide details on your Collaboration with NA/departments at the central level/state level in institutionalising SDG framework and rollout?
- Have you supported the government (technical assistance/capacity building)?
  1. **State**
  2. **Centre**
- Are you part of any committee/task group/resource group on SDG 6 at District/State/Centre level? Regional level? What is the role of this group? What is your contribution to the same?

### **Appendix-3: List of organisations contacted for the study**

- WaterAid
- Water for People
- Save the Children
- FANSA
- Wada Na Todo Abhiyan
- UNICEF (Central Office/Regional HQ: Hyderabad)
- UNDP
- Cure India
- Action for Food Production (AFPRO)
- TERI
- MDWS
- Niti Aayog
- Government of Punjab/Jharkhand
- Samarthan
- Narayanan Bhat (independent Consultant)