



KNOW THEIR STORIES

A case study on the
existing water crisis
in Nabashan village,
Bankura District



Introducing Nabashan...

The status of the Indian economy is like a peacock, with beautiful fans displaying its range of colours in terms of the billionaires, while its feet which it tries to hide are ugly, with the lower class of society striving hard to make their ends meet. The sky scrapers line the beautifully decorated roads with eye dazzling lights of the urban mainstream. The tall buildings rising high enough to touch the sky with fountains adding to the décor, gives a magnificent look to the developed cities of India. While the rich are living in luxurious complexes with rooftop swimming pools, cafeteria and other lavish arrangements to add to their comforts, there is a parallel India, where the people of the rural areas are deprived of even the fundamental resources for survival i.e. water, sanitation and hygiene. The deprivation and miseries of such people is brought out in the following case study of Nabashan village of Kustore Gram Panchayat located in Mejhia Block of Bankura district. It is situated 11.4 kilometers away from sub-district headquarter Mejhia and is approximately 39.2 kilometers away from the district headquarter.

History...

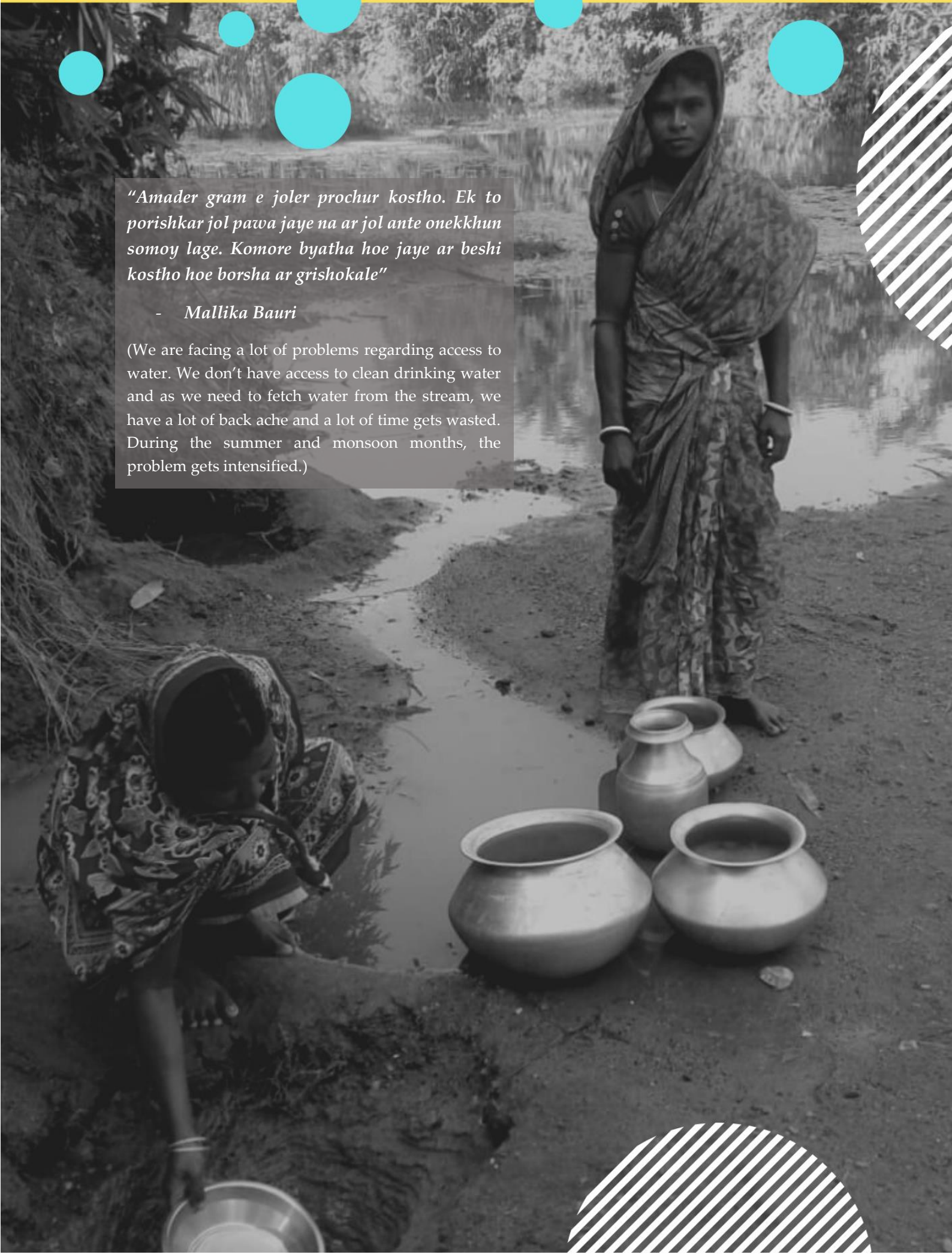
According to the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC), 2011, there are 49 households in Nabashan village and all the households belong to the Scheduled Caste (SC) category. One of the villager 'Fakir Bauri' gave a brief description of the evolution of the village. As heard from his ancestors, this village belonged to the Zamindars based at Pubra Madanpur village of Bardhaman district. To take care of the agricultural activities on this land, the Zamindars had appointed a farmer named 'Golapi Bauri'. She settled them along with her family and gradually her relatives moved in, expanding the Bauri community. With time their generation formed a settlement in that village, and cultivated the agricultural land, as a means of livelihood and in return paid two quintals of paddy per bigha to the landowners i.e. the zamindars settled at Bardhaman district at the end of each Kharif season. Similar practices have been followed by each passing generation till date. Here, most of the people earn their livelihood as daily wage labourers during the agricultural season and engage themselves in MGNREGS work during the other time of the year. With no other means of livelihood to fall back on, sometimes, in case of dire need to meet their hunger, they resort to hunting of wild animals.



"Amader gram e joler prochur kostho. Ek to porishkar jol pawa jaye na ar jol ante onekkhun somoy lage. Komore byatha hoe jaye ar beshi kostho hoe borsha ar grishokale"

- Mallika Bauri

(We are facing a lot of problems regarding access to water. We don't have access to clean drinking water and as we need to fetch water from the stream, we have a lot of back ache and a lot of time gets wasted. During the summer and monsoon months, the problem gets intensified.)



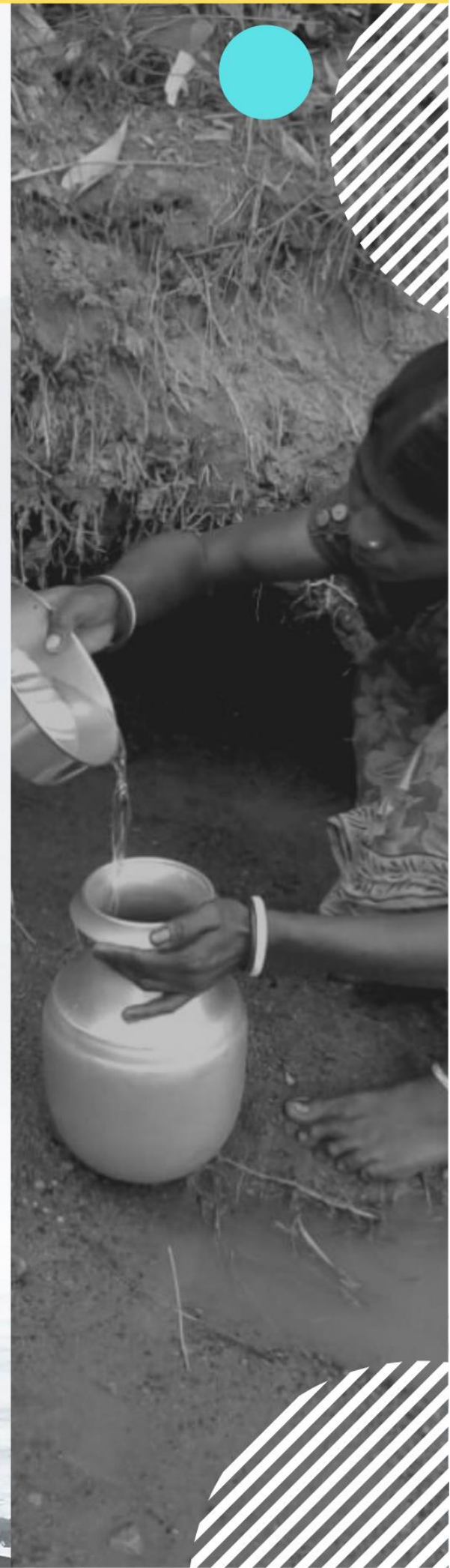


The Harsh Reality...

The most touching and heart wrenching aspect of this case study is how the community struggle each day to fetch water for survival. Water, which most of us consider a free gift, provided by nature is not so 'free' for these people. Fetching each drop of drinking water has been a major challenge for all the generations of this community, a situation which is hard to imagine by most of the city dwellers. The hydro-geological structure and the soil condition are such that the construction and maintenance of tubewells is difficult. The soil is mostly derived from decomposed rocks deposited by the stream. Due to its coarse structure and loose nature, it easily slides off thereby blocking/chocking the pipes of the tubewells, making those non-functional. Further the soil erosion is another important cause affecting land utilization and land management system in this area. The configuration of the terrain being undulating, the clearance of forests for agriculture without the usual safeguards for conservation resulted in abnormal impoverishment of the soil, also directly affecting the water resources. Because of the paucity of water resources for drinking, cooking and other domestic purposes, the community has to resort to a narrow stream nearby which flows across the land and drains into the Damodar River. The people mechanically curve out the sand and generate small pockets in the path of the stream to collect water from there. The water is allowed to accumulate in the pockets and when the sediment settles down, the water is collected in utensils and carried to their houses.




Few villagers use plastic strainers and clean cloth to filter the water while most villagers directly consume it. Although there are three tubewells in the village, two of those are defunct while use of the third one has been forbidden by the government due to high iron content. Such is the plight of the villagers that with no other source of drinking water, the villagers have to resort to the stream which is around two hundred meters away from their houses. The petrifying WASH scenario in Nabashan village thus calls for urgent remedy. The uncared, unheard people have been struggling each day of their entire life to get a sip of safe water. There is a small well situated in the school premises of the Nabashan village, the water from which is used for cooking of mid-day meal for the school children. Apart from this there is no other source of drinking water in the village. The same stream serve the purpose of washing and bathing. As evident, people suffer from diarrhea very often with children falling prey to it very easily. Access to inadequate safe drinking water which claims 2,00,000 lives every year in India (according to Composite Water Management Index Report released by NITI Aayog in 2018), a village like this underpins such empirical studies. Estimated incidence of diarrhea among children up to 5 years, (based on pregnant women reported for ANC and number of children who suffered from diarrhea reported to the sub-centre during 2018-19) for Bankura district and Mejia block were 6.7% and 7.1% respectively. (Source: HMIS data downloaded from <https://data.gov.in/> downloaded on 23rd April, 2020). Actual cases will be much higher since many cases are not reported and that will be even more in Nabashan. Access to safe drinking water, being one of the major factor behind enhancing the longevity of people and raising the standard of living and all people across the globe deserve the access to bare minimum safe water facilities as a human right, with this village no exception to it.



The Silver Lining...

On 24th of December, 2019, the team from SIGMA Foundation reached Nabashan village to conduct the community consultation. Women from three SHGs in the village and around 20 men have gathered near the grazing land outside the village. After the problems related to their lack of access to clean water was discussed, the facilitators shared about the opportunities and benefits arising from the Asian Development Bank assisted 'West Bengal Drinking Water Sector Improvement Project (WBDWSIP)'. As they came to know that 70 LPCD safe water will be piped into the dwelling of every household (HH) round the clock (24x7) under this project, the people were overjoyed and it came down as a silver lining to their dark lives. It also gleans some useful lessons on how 'Smart Water Management' can counter all the situations and can be an economic bright spot for gender equality and livelihood.





"Prokolpo rupayan hole amader jeebon onek bhalo hobe. Asha kori khub taratari amra barite jol pabo"

- *Badali Bauri*

(Our lives will be benefitted a lot after the implementation of the project. We expect that we will get water in our dwellings soon.)



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