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Dear Friends,

We are happy to bring out the first newsletter of the Arsenic Knowledge and Action Network, a knowledge driven dynamic collaboration of partner organizations and individuals sharing a common vision to bring systematic and structural changes in arsenic mitigation strategies in India.

There is a pressing need today, for larger alliances and groups with explicit focus on arsenic to come together and collaborate to address this grave disaster staring us in the eye. A collaborative effort such as this is aimed at improving the learning curve and uptake of knowledge, identifying replicable best practices, translating research to practice, and increasing the visibility of people working on the arsenic issue and most importantly, visibility of local level concerns.

It is in recognition of the above, that the Network has been formed. As a platform facilitating convergence of experts, practitioners, communities and policy makers, we aim to make it an effective platform that will support coordinated efforts for arsenic mitigation in the country.

The Network has begun this journey with seed funding and operational/intellectual guidance from Arghyam and for it to become a success, it is critical that all like minded people collaborate and come forward to contribute in this attempt. SaciWATERS, Hyderabad functions as the secretariat for the Network and plays the role of connector and facilitator for it's activities.

This newsletter is an attempt to keep the members as well as people outside the network abreast with the activities of the network as well the latest developments in the sphere of arsenic research and mitigation. Our attempt would be to make this newsletter a monthly feature. Readers are welcome to contribute to the forthcoming volumes of this newsletter.

Hope this first volume is a meaningful read for you all. We keenly look forward to your comments, suggestions and contributions.

Editorial Team  
Arsenic Knowledge and Action Network Newsletter



# Network Inception Meeting



The initiation meeting for the Arsenic Knowledge and Action Network was held on October 22–23, 2013 in Hyderabad. The meeting was attended by a group of 25 participants from across the country and from various sectors and disciplines, like researchers, academicians and subject experts, government and corporate representatives, NGOs, and representatives from grassroots organizations.

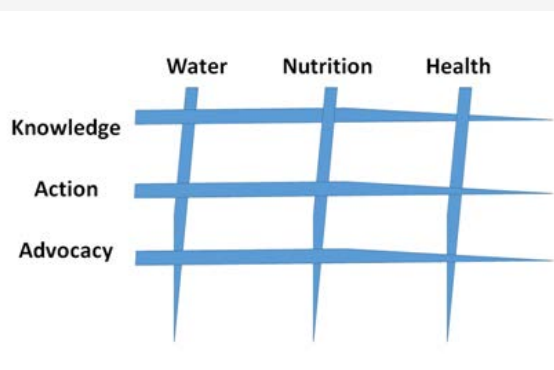
The aim of this inception meeting was to set out goals and objectives for the network both in the short term (next one year) and long term (three to five years) and also to identify areas where the network should aim to carry our interventions or knowledge generation exercises.

Session 1 “Setting Context: Issues and Concerns around Arsenic Contamination in India” was essentially about giving an introduction about the prevalent issue surrounding arsenic and setting up the foundation for further discussions. Session 2 was a facilitated open discussion involving technical experts from the field of Arsenic studies, i.e. Dr. Arunabha Majumder, Dr. D N Guha Mazumder, Dr. Ashok Ghosh and Dr. Chandan Mahanta, each with extensive experience in the field of Arsenic studies. Session 3 revolved around understanding network collaborations and the role of networks in social development with Amitabh Behar (NFI, Delhi) and Ravindra A (WASSAN, Hyderabad) as panellists. This session shed light on the way networks have functioned in the past and what we have to learn and un-learn from their experiences. Session 4 essentially revolved around setting out a vision for the network

and identifying short term and long term goals that the network should focus on. Session 5 was the final session, anchored by Himanshu Kulkarni (ACWADAM, Pune) and brought the meeting to a structured end by trying to identify specific targeted activities, both short term and long term.

Some of the main outputs / action areas / activities that were identified at the end of the meeting were:

1. A framework for the network's functioning where the network would target activities falling under the intersection of the themes shown in the figure below.



2. A State of the Sector Report on arsenic in India.
3. Mapping institutions and monitoring flow of funds allocated for arsenic mitigation in India.
4. The network would be a repository of arsenic related knowledge and a medium for knowledge exchange.





## Visit to Assam

The Fluoride Network and Arsenic Network teams undertook a field visit to Assam with the agenda of establishing contacts with the various stakeholders in Assam, namely the PHED, NGOs, educational institutions and conducted an exploratory field visit to two fluoride affected villages in Naogaon district. The network teams were accompanied by Dr. Raja Reddy (Senior Consultant Neurosurgeon, Apollo Hospitals and Professor Emeritus & Former Director, Nizam's institute of Medical Sciences) and Suneetha Sapur (Director, Akshaya Foundation) for technical assistance. The group was helped immensely by Mr.

A B Paul (Retd. Chief Engineer, PHED, Assam) in coordinating the field work as well the meetings with government officials and NGOs. The field visit opened up opportunities for the Arsenic network to carry forward its work in Assam and with the connections already established through this visit, another field trip to arsenic affected areas is being planned in the upcoming month with the aim of identifying spaces in need of immediate attention from external players and where intervention activities can be planned and taken up soon.



## ELS 2014

The Earth Living Skin: Soil, Life and Climate Change (ELS 2014) is the first conference being organized under the auspices of the Soil System Sciences (SSS) Division of the European Geosciences Union, to be held from 21–25 September 2014 in Nova Yardina, Castellanta Marina (TA), Italy.

Dr. Ashok Ghosh (A.N. College, Patna) and his team are organizing a session during the conference the

arsenic theme, titled "Geogenic Arsenic in The Soils and Aquifers: Causes and Environmental Impacts", being convened by Dr. Ghosh. He encourages members of the Arsenic Network to work towards presenting at the conference and invites research papers for the same. Details of the conference session can be found at

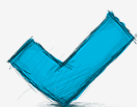
<http://meetingorganizer.copernicus.org/ELS2014/session/16097>



## Arsenic Information Portal

The Network, in collaboration with the India Water Portal (IWP), has started work on building an arsenic knowledge repository and has launched an information portal on IWP.

The URL for the web-page is <http://www.indiawaterportal.org/topics/arsenic>



## Water Quality Conference in Guwahati, Assam

The Assam PHED, UNICEF and IIT Guwahati organized a conference at the Water and Sanitation Support Organization (WSSO) premises in Guwahati titled "Water Quality in Assam: Status and Strategies" on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> December 2013. The conference had presentations from researchers working on a wide range of issues ranging from Public Health Perspectives on WASH to Low Cost Community Filters to Water Treatment Technologies with Emphasis on Microbial Contamination and had participation from PHED Engineers, Academicians and Student Researchers.

The conference also had a panel discussion each on the Arsenic and Fluoride Problems with Reference to Assam. Karthik Seshan from the Arsenic Network and Vikas Ratanjee from the Fluoride Network gave presentations to the gathering on the idea of the networks and the strategies for both from an Assam perspective.

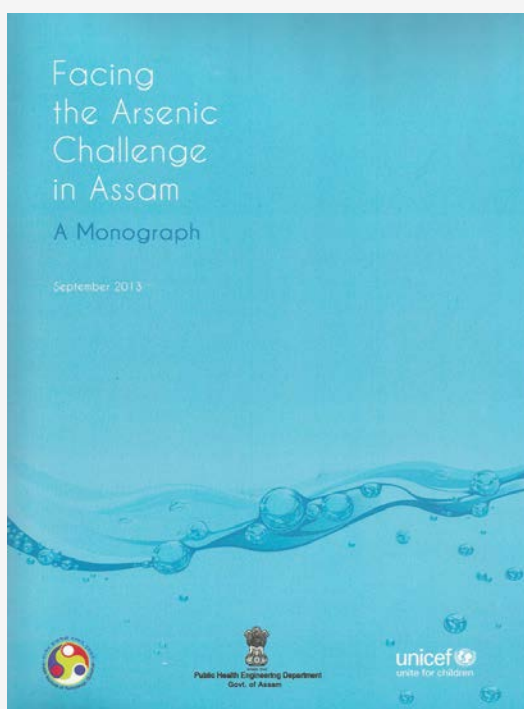
Also part of the discussions, representing both the networks were Dr. Rajnarayan Indu (Director, INREM Foundation), Mr. Ayan Biswas (Arghyam, Bangalore), Ms. Suneetha Sapur (Director, Akkshaya Foundation) and Dr. Raja Reddy.



## Arsenic Screening and Surveillance Programme, Assam

UNICEF, IIT-Guwahati and the Assam PHED conducted an Arsenic Screening and Surveillance Program in Assam from 2006 – 2011 during which they tested 56,180 public water sources spread across 76 blocks in 18 districts identified as high risk areas in terms of arsenic in groundwater, based on a rapid assessment conducted in 2004-05. The results showed that 30% of the water sources had arsenic levels higher than the WHO and BIS permissible limit of 10 ppb ( $\mu\text{g/l}$ ) while 8 percent were above 50 ppb.

The findings, outcomes and conclusions of this extensive testing exercise were released in the form of a monograph titled "Facing the Arsenic Challenge in Assam" during the Water Quality Conference mentioned above. Here is a snapshot of the monograph, available only as a hard copy as of now.





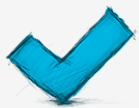
## Arghyam's Initiative in Sahibganj, Jharkhand

Sahibganj is one of the identified water quality affected districts in Jharkhand and arsenic contamination is one of the key WQ problems in this area. The Drinking Water Sanitation Department, Government of Jharkhand (DWSD, GoJ) is building a multi-village water supply scheme (MVS) to provide safe drinking water to three WQ affected (two of which are arsenic affected) blocks in Sahibganj.

Poor WATSAN status in Sahibganj is a combination of governance issues, weak and nascent village/Gram Panchayat (GP) level institutions and low community participation and arsenic has found its way into drinking water in these areas due to geogenic reasons. Arghyam, in association with Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), a Delhi based NGO as the central anchor, and Society for Advancement in Tribes, Health, Education, Environment (SATHEE), a Godda based NGO (a district neighbouring

Sahibganj) as the field partner, will use arsenic mitigation as an entry-point for field interventions, eventually attempting to address the larger issue of water security by improving WATSAN governance systems and developing capacities of PRIs (Panchayati Raj Institutions) to manage systems.

The project aims to address water security issues in 6 Gram Panchayats (GPs) of 2 arsenic affected blocks (Udhua and Mandro) in Sahibganj. All 6 GPs will be supported to develop Water Security Plans in collaboration with the village level water and sanitation committee. These plans will be developed at a village level and consolidated at the GP In line with the broader definition of water security, the project, according to Arghyam, seeks to facilitate access to improved sanitation in these 6 GPs reaching an estimated population of about 30,000.



## In the Next Issue

- Progress on State of Knowledge Report on arsenic in India
- Network sponsored student internships in arsenic affected areas
- Arsenic training modules for medical practitioners in Assam in collaboration with NRHM
- And much more...



## Contributions

Contributions from readers about anything related to arsenic and water in general for the forthcoming volumes are welcome. Please get in touch with Karthik Seshan at [karthik@saciwaters.org](mailto:karthik@saciwaters.org) for the same.

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