

## Monitoring... (continued)

Monitoring has become a critical component of Water For People's ongoing strategy. Without it, new projects would continue to be implemented with little understanding of what has worked and not worked in the past. An ongoing monitoring program provides valuable data on functionality and use of water systems and flags problem areas for improvement.

## Monitoring in India

Water For People conducted its first monitoring trip to India in March 2007. A team of World Water Corps volunteers, Water For People staff, and representatives from Indian partner organizations visited a total of 96 projects in two weeks, including six schools; 33 communities, and 57 arsenic filters. Overall, the results were quite good. Only two projects were no longer functioning.

As expected, the monitoring trip also uncovered some issues and areas for improvement:

- School projects were 100% operational and students exhibited knowledge of improved hygiene behaviors. The ongoing challenge will be to ensure that facilities are adequate and available to entire school populations and to link school programs with community programs.

- Past community projects were in good working order. Water flows were adequate year-round, and 100% of people interviewed said they used the Water For People-supported source for drinking water. Only 1% reported any seasonal water shortages. Community management was strong, but some communities needed to improve financial management of projects.
- The arsenic program, which began in 1997, was experiencing some challenges. While 99% of people interviewed said they had enough water from the filters year-round, many of the filters were poorly managed and volunteers estimated that some will soon fail if adequate support issues are not addressed. These problems would not have been identified without the monitoring program.

The data generated from the monitoring visit to India will be used for future planning and continuous improvement initiatives. It is estimated that the India data will be on the Water For People website at [www.waterforpeople.org](http://www.waterforpeople.org) by the end of June 2007. ■

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# VOICES FROM THE FIELD

summer 2007



News about Water For People's work in West Bengal, Gateway to East India.

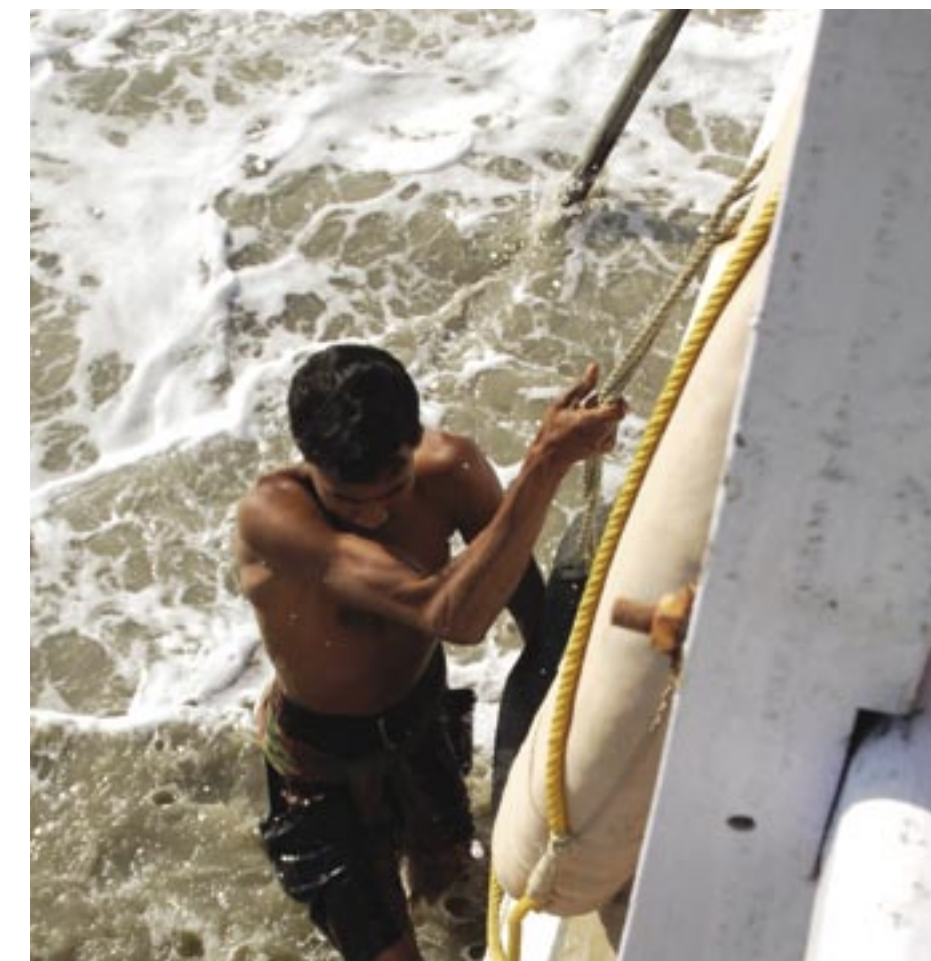


## A Perilous Journey to a Bright Destination

by Wende Valentine, Associate Manager, Regional International Programs

Have you ever been on a trip where the journey didn't match the destination? My December 2006 site visit to the remote Sundarban Islands in West Bengal, India, was one such voyage.

We departed Kolkata (formerly known as Calcutta) just as the sun was rising, careening and honking our way through the congested streets of the most densely populated city in India. Dodging people, cows, bicycles, carts, giant Tata trucks, and vehicles of all shapes and sizes, we continued on into the depths of the South 24 Parganas District. After a terrifying four-hour jeep ride, our journey was only half over.



A crew member climbs back into the boat after freeing it from the mud. Photo: © Water For People / by Wende Valentine

## WEST BENGAL AT-A-GLANCE

<b>Population:</b>	80,221,171 (2001) (904 people per square kilometer)
<b>Languages:</b>	Bengali
<b>Per capita income:</b>	US\$5,901
<b>Life expectancy:</b>	62.5 years
<b>Under-five mortality rate:</b>	85/1,000 live births
<b>Geographic range:</b>	Coastal gangetic plains to the foothills of the Himalayas; 88,752 square kilometers


Source: World Factbook and UNICEF 2006

The focus of Water For People's work in the West Bengal region of India is on the development of safe drinking water systems, improved sanitation facilities, and hygiene education in rural communities and schools. Water For People is also continuing to work on arsenic mitigation in partnership with Bengal Engineering and Science University.

News about Water For People's  
work in West Bengal, India



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## A Perilous Journey... (continued)

We had reached our "launch" on the Bay of Bengal. I stepped out of the car feeling lucky to be alive and instantly queasy. Even though it was winter in West Bengal, the sun's rays were relentless. Filled with despair, the big brown eyes of local Bengalis hawking their wares of masala tea, woven baskets, fried dough, roasted nuts, and other delicacies surrounded us as we waited to board the rickety boat that would ferry us to three Water For People project communities.

We sputtered and spewed our way out into the delta of crocodile-infested waters with elusive Bengal tigers lurking on the shores. I gazed in awe at a vast ecosystem of mangrove wetlands, an immense sea of mud flats, and the sheer scarcity of resources. As if that weren't enough, I was reminded that the area is notoriously susceptible to cyclones, tidal surges, and flash floods. As a result, the water and soil have a high salt content and fresh water is scarce. I couldn't help but imagine the suffering that must permeate such a remote and vulnerable place.

After an hour of slow and steady movement, the boat came to a sudden halt. The buoys placed to move along with the changes in tides had not shifted accordingly and our boat had lodged itself into mud as thick as molasses. In true Indian fashion, we sat for two hours just hoping the boat would miraculously start moving again. When it occurred to us that the sun was going to set before we reached our destination, two crew members finally dove into the murky water. They physically pushed the two-ton vessel with the help of a long wooden pole in what seemed to be a futile attempt to dislodge it from the mud. Finally, after 30 minutes of sheer determination, shouts of joy erupted as we finally felt the boat begin to slowly move again.



Members of the water committee celebrate a new well in Pathar Pratima.

Photo: © Water For People / by Wende Valentine

The sparkling teeth of 200 giant smiles greeted us from the distance as we approached Pathar Pratima. Men, women, and children of all ages scrambled to help us off of the launch and into the throngs of grinning people, all nodding and gesturing a warm salutation of "Namaskar."

It was clear that they had been waiting for several hours to show us the fruits of a cohesive commitment and project success.

Grabbing hold of our hands, women in brightly colored saris led us down a dirt path flanked by rice paddies. Various people waved at us while still working as the sun set. Children, full of life and hope, sang and played around us as we walked. Our final destination was a brightly painted green hand pump that had been fitted to a hand-dug tube well.

After such an arduous journey, I felt like I had landed in an oasis of joy.

The water committee, comprised of 10 women, was eager to discuss the design of their well. Placed strategically within the community, the well serves 250 people, all of whom live within a radius of 300 meters. It has a beautiful thatched roof, a well-constructed drainage system, and a separate area for washing clothes. Each woman showed us her personal tool kit, and as a team, they demonstrated that they could expertly take apart and reassemble the hand pump.

When asked, they showed us their financial records indicating the names, dates, and amounts for the tariff collection. They discussed the importance of how and when to wash their hands. They beamed as they spoke of their improved health and the extra time they now had to spend on income-generating activities. And they explained that the local government had not only contributed to the project but had helped them plan and train for the first time in decades.

I couldn't help but feel tears well up in my eyes to think that after a harrowing journey through such a desperate and neglected region that the destination could feel so productive, inspiring, and alive. Everything about the community and the project felt sustainable, which of course is Water For People's primary goal.

I left Pathar Pratima with a confident feeling that in ten years, that beautiful green hand pump attached to the hand-dug tube well will still be providing safe water to this community. It was a wonderful feeling—and made the difficult journey seem a small price to pay. ■

## Monitoring: The Key to Sustainability

Like most international development organizations, Water For People has been focused on completing projects to meet the need. And like so many organizations, keeping track of previous projects became a secondary priority.

But one of Water For People's primary goals is system sustainability—and that means checking back to ensure the long-term viability of past work. Since its founding in 1991, Water For People has funded and supported the development of nearly 800 water and sanitation projects worldwide, but until recently, knew very little about the status of past projects.



A volunteer catalogues one of fifty-seven arsenic filters.

Photo: © Water For People / by Kate Fogelberg

With a pilot trip to Honduras in August 2006, Water For People launched its innovative monitoring program to assess the ongoing functionality of all past projects in each program country. Using volunteers, a carefully developed research methodology, and state-of-the-art GPS and mobile GIS technologies, Water For People's monitoring program is assessing everything from system operation to water quality to community support structures.

"Very few development organizations have any kind of monitoring program to assess past project successes," says Ned Breslin, Water For People's Director of International Programs. "By doing so and by developing a system that will be accessible to the public at large, Water For People is showing its commitment to openness, transparency, and accountability for its actions overseas."

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Photo: © Water For People / by Wende Valentine

### Greetings from India, a Country Rich in Culture and Diversity

Greetings from Kolkata! Thanks to your support and encouragement, Water For People-India's program has successfully completed its second year. When we started in 2005, we had only two staff members and a tiny donated work space. Today we have five full-time staff and a small but well-equipped office.

The past few months have been a time of experimentation and learning. We had to make some difficult decisions about how and where to focus our work to meet the tremendous need and achieve tangible results. To choose an area of intervention from a country as large and diverse as India was not easy. We also needed to choose trustworthy partners who share our vision and commitment, and who will complete work in the true spirit of partnership with a focus on sustainability. I am pleased to report that we now have eight partners on board.

After much research and discussion, our five-year strategy was finalized in December. The plan was developed using data from baseline studies and field workshops, with input from our colleagues in Denver. Our work over the next five years will be in four districts of West Bengal, covering a target population of 200,000 people.

In the districts of Nadia and North 24 Parganas, our main focus will be on arsenic mitigation, but we will also work to develop water and sanitation solutions in schools reaching approximately 100,000 students. In the South 24 Parganas and Purbo Medinipur Districts, community water and sanitation programs will be implemented in 20 villages impacting 60,000 people with a target of 100% water and sanitation coverage. We will also target 34 government schools (with approximately 40,000 children) in these two districts with infrastructure and hygiene education.

Hygiene promotion—emphasizing hand washing, safe water handling, and proper waste disposal—will be an integral part of all of our interventions. We believe that this holistic approach will go a long way in reducing child mortality and illness.

Water For People-India has set challenging goals. The key to their sustainable implementation will rest on our ability to strengthen our partnerships and build partner capacity. In the coming months, we will be working to maximize our impact on the formidable water and sanitation problems in West Bengal.

Thank you for your continued support,

*Rajashi Mukherjee*

Rajashi Mukherjee

Country Coordinator, Water For People-India

**Our mission:** Water For People helps people in developing countries improve their quality of life by supporting the development of locally sustainable drinking water resources, sanitation facilities and health and hygiene education programs.

**Our vision** is a world where all people have access to safe drinking water and sanitation; a world where no one suffers or dies from a water- or sanitation-related disease



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