



# CHANGING THE FLOW TOGETHER

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Cover Photo: Woman in Matikhalo village, September 2019 selling her daily harvest of “*Kewda*” or *Pandanus* flowers that grows abundantly in Chhatrapur, Odisha supported by natural wetland regimes

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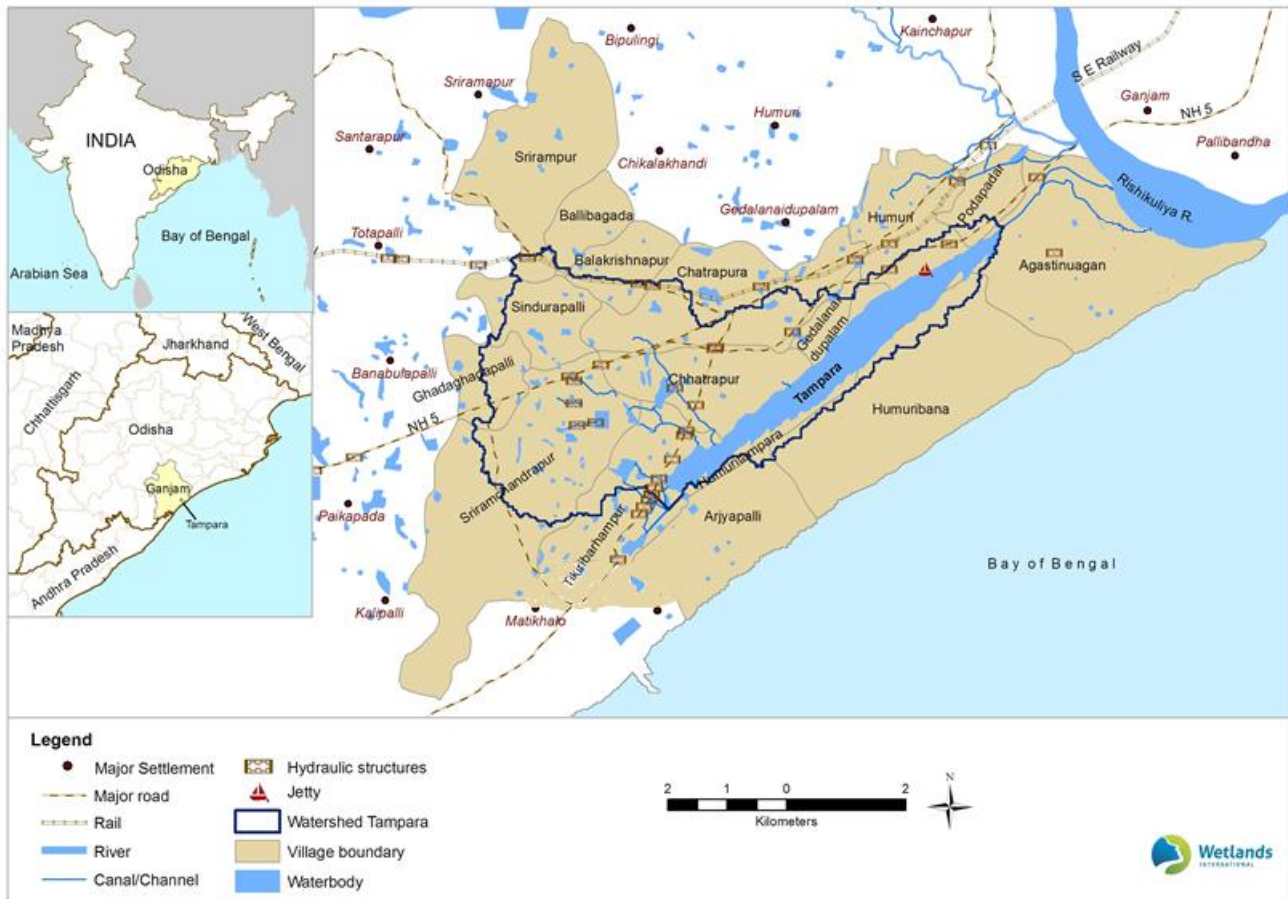
## ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION
TDS	TOTAL DISSOLVED SOLIDS
VWSC	VILLAGE WATER AND SANITATION COMMITTEE
MI	MINOR IRRIGATION

## FIGURES

Map showing location of Tampara wetland in Odisha, India

The Tampara wetland is of key importance to many communities in the coastal area of the eastern India state Odisha. However, human activity in the wetland put the water security for tens of thousands of people at risk. Awareness raising by the Watershed Empowering Citizens programme increased the understanding of the people of Kanamana Panchayat living near the wetland on where their water is coming from. This has opened the way for improved water resource management. Backed by evidence, communities can now confidently take water issues forward and advocate for change with their government.



Map showing location of Tampara wetland in Odisha, India

Located in the hinterland of the Bay of Bengal, the Tampara wetland is the main source of fresh water for tens of thousands of people. But over the past decennia, urbanization, population growth and increased industrial activity significantly jeopardized the wetland ecosystem. The once interconnected waterbodies such as the Tampara Lake and the countless ponds, rivers, and canals of the area were blocked, disturbed, and polluted. As a result, the free flow of water was impeded, and freshwater scarcity became more and more common.

As Kauthi Satyanarayana Reddy, a ward member of Tikiria Berhampur village reminisces: *“Some ten years back the ponds in villages remained full of water throughout the year. Most ponds were used for drinking, cooking, bathing, and washing. But now only little water remains in ponds during summers and water quality also deteriorates making it unfit for drinking or cooking purposes”.*

These issues were also felt by the inhabitants of Kanamana Panchayat, one of the five Gram Panchayats forming the catchment of Tampara wetland. However, most people in this cluster of four villages were unaware of the *quality* of their water and had little knowledge on the importance of the interconnectivity of their waterbodies. A usual reflex to solve the issues was to look at NGO programmes for new structures and hardware like pipes and bore wells. However, once Kanamana became a pilot site for the Watershed Empowering Citizens programme the villagers learned that building hardware only does not bring lasting solutions. It was time to take more control over the waterbodies in their area.

Instead of focusing on water hardware, the emphasis of Watershed was on improving water *software* by building knowledge and capacity to sustain water supplies and manage water. In a series of meetings people from local CSOs and the Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSCs) learned how a fall in groundwater levels results in salinization of freshwater pockets.

The increased understanding of the interconnectedness of water regimes is expressed by Bhadrachalam Venkata Rabana, a resident of Kanamana village who says *“Tampara is now reduced to a grassland and as a result of degradation of wetland regimes groundwater recharge does not take place and water levels in borewells is falling.”*

In addition, for the first time in years, water quality testing was conducted in the area, informing the citizens on water levels and the presence of total dissolved solids (TDS), like minerals, salts, and irons, in their water. For Tikiria Berhampur, one of the villages of the Panchayat, the testing resulted in the sealing of four water points with dangerous levels of fluoride.

Together CSOs and VWSCs followed up with water security plans that support the planning of water resource management in the different villages. *“Through the Watershed programme we realised that water security planning is important. We have prepared water security plans for all the villages in the Panchayat and shared these with the government officials and many activities have been approved.”*, states Sodi Chakrapani Reddy, the Sarpanch (elected decision-maker) of Kanamana Panchayat. Armed with evidence on water quality the communities are in a much better position to present water issues to their government. This has for example resulted in a piped water scheme for Tikiria Berhampur village, the renovation of multiple village ponds and rejuvenation of channels that allow the wetland ecosystem to regain its flow. Moreover, after hearing out the communities, the local leader of Kanamana Panchayat prioritized water security actions and secured funds from the Minor Irrigation Department for the renovation and drainage work of a vital irrigation pond in Kanamana village.

Watershed program officer Kalpana Ambastha recalls the change she witnessed in Kanamana Panchayat: *“You can see there is a change in the way people are looking at programmes. As agencies we were supposed to be the ‘givers’ or ‘donors’ of hardware, but we don’t give things to install. After this idea sunk in, a ‘do it yourself change’ has taken place. People know what the issue is, how they should resolve it, where to get funds. People are active for water now.”* With the activation of the communities, CSOs, VWSCs and government authorities of Kanamana Panchayat, the

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ingredients are in place to restore the flow of the Tampara Wetland and safeguard the much-needed water security of the area.

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Village water security plan meeting in Puruna Chhatrapur village, Kanamana Panchayat, June 2019

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Training of CSOs on geohydrological assessments, June 2018 in Tampara wetland basin, Odisha



Work on renovation of Ghai Bandha of Matikhalo village, Kanamana Panchayat was undertaken in April 2020



Minor Irrigation Department has initiated work on construction of irrigation canal and renovation of Bada Bandha MI pond in Kanamana

The Watershed Empowering Citizens Programme 2016-2020 aims to build the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs), at international level and in The Netherlands, for evidence-based lobbying and advocacy on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) issues. The programme is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented by IRC, Simavi, Wetlands International and Akvo. In India, the programme is supported by local partners Gram Uthhan, Nidan, Centre for Budgetary Governance and Accountability, Arid Communities and Technologies. (For more information please visit: <https://watershed.nl/resources/>)