



‘Quenching a Bigger Thirst’ - Meet Seema Azharuddin, President, Jaldhaara Foundation

1. How did you decide to enter into the domain of WASH and Safe water solutions?

Leaders focus on their motivations and their drivers. I have been leading and am a leader by choice, not by position if may humbly say so. I was motivated from a young age to champion a cause and lead from an honest place and serve others. Water and air give us life. It was when I learned and saw that these two major fundamental needs are still in struggling mode, I decided to get on board of this mission-critical cause and be part of the solutions.

2. As an NGO dealing with the many challenges for the implementation of WASH needs, what do you think is the biggest on this subject?

It's the challenge of providing safe drinking water in a sustainable manner. Water-borne diseases from Fluoride, contamination through sewerage or groundwater, lack of potable water. These and other several reasons are only too well known and all of them are BIG! Our partnerships with our governments do help, but they have their own initiatives in providing for the nation. An NGO is not a substitute or replacement for the government's efforts. We work in small but highly impacted areas where governments may not have reached.

3. How many communities have you been working with and how many people are you targeting to impact in the next few years?

In our state of Telangana alone we are working in fifteen (15) communities, where we have implemented Decentral-



Seema Azharuddin

Building awareness and creating in-service together partnerships and funding are what makes cause progress to greater heights. To date, all of the proceeds from my production house goes to HIV affected and infected women and children, some 300 of them. The network and net worth of people and social families and friends, I'm connected with con-



hend. This told, it is a sad story in itself for our world. When I saw women walk several kilometres to get water from a stagnant water body shared by animals around, and then walk back to have their family drink it, and then later see their babies die from it, it deeply affected me. It was horrific, sad and unforgiving. This is a cause I wish to champion for as long as I am able. These stories touch, whip, scathes and rips at the heart.

dia, and 'Maithri Aquatech', with its incredible innovation that harvests moisture from the air.

We are at the heart of rural, peri-urban, and urban slums and ensure long-term sustainability through a community-centred approach.

8. Are there any difficulties in securing funding for such an endeavour as this is still a developing subject?

A fundamental need of every man, woman and child, is what is NOT developing fast enough. So, give funds, make it a habit to give to go past this developing subject and until the goal is reached. Yes, there are difficulties, and we at 'Jaldhaara' are up against things like government permissions on land not coming through where we can construct our water health centres for our needy communities. We are in competition with other causes with corporates and CSR funding that change their theme of giving by the year. Natural disasters and pandemics change the direction of funding. Many reasons it gets difficult, but it's that art of giving that is such a superior habit and can help change 'difficult' to all good things for all people.

I'm reminded of a cool saying by Scott Harrison of Charity: Water and I quote, "It should be cool to give. It should be cool to be generous. It should be cool to say yes to helping out."

9. Having worked in multiple fields like entertainment, media, communication for change, what do you think is the change needed in the development sector-specially on the subject of WASH?

The development sector should be

ized Community Water Systems (DCWS). We have impacted around 120 communities pan – India and are looking at expanding our presence to 100 more underserved communities in the next two (2) years. This expansion would improve safe drinking water access for about 1.5 million people. Our partners, 'Water Health India' and 'Maithri Aquatec' are leaders in the Operations and Maintenance of such water purification units.

4. You mention pan-India for impact. Any support in the plans for the North-east?

Recently a study was done for WASH needs in Assam and Meghalaya. The focus is on about 15 villages and rural schools that need sustainable improved water sources and our partner, 'Maithri Aquatech' are in the process of evaluating a sustainable water solution called 'Meghdoot', an Atmospheric Water Generator (AWG) that harvests moisture from the air – a vast and renewable water source, to generate fresh water whenever and wherever it's needed.

My mother and her family hail from Assam, and part of my heart is with the people of this land, I am going to work on the plan for their safe water needs.

5. Being a multifaceted individual and an activist working for this cause how do you plan to harness your social capital for this cause?

Contribute constantly to the need of the cause. I ask with a passion quite furiously! Harnessing with Corporates and Government and supporting the bigger picture has its processes.

It is my belief in the three P's of people, planet, and profit, and the system it cycles, is what harnesses the goodwill and good sense to provide for those in need, however, harnessing, funding and granting has scaled up to hard work strategies, focused Donor needs and compliance and other rules of engagement that screams the activist in me. For my cause for safe drinking water at 'Jaldhaara Foundation' and to assure the dignity for sustained hygiene and sanitation, the activist in me will go the mile to beg, borrow and steal as well, if necessary!

6. Could you mention any specific incident or story from the ground which deeply touched you to take up this cause/continue with your work for this cause?

The fact that the cause is so deep in need of attention and even love, is what is so touching, maddening even. The millions who suffer and die from incidents and stories of why safe water was denied to them or was not made affordable or how lack of sanitation demeans our society to allow for open defecation that further damages our flowing waters not to speak of dignity, especially for our women and children, is hard to compre-

7. Safe drinking water is widely recognized as a human right. It is the 6th SDG of the 17 goals defined by WHO/ UNICEF that needs to be met globally by the year 2030. How close to the truth are we on this goal?

Safe drinking water is a right and necessity, but the magnitude of the scope and work is huge in a country like India. The government, both Central and State have been working on multiple areas to ensure that every household in the country has access to purified and safe drinking water by 2030.

"Har Ghar Jal", "Mission Bhagirathi", and similar programs have been working towards ensuring this basic right alongside foundations and Trusts etc. India, its vastness, its population is the reality and the truth is, in my mind, that we are still far in reaching the 2030 goal.

We at Jaldhaara Foundation have been complementing the efforts of the government through our Decentralized Community Water Systems (DCWS), which aims to minimize the demand-supply gap that exists in our country. The DCWSs has been implemented in such a manner that communities that are still on the periphery with respect to safe drinking water are provided with this service through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) by Jaldhaara Foundation and its technical partners, 'Waterhealth, In-

able to balance advocacy in awareness creation and education with the ability to provide the desired infrastructure for such programs.

10. Your favourite part of Jaldhaara services that you would like to drive?

Interesting question, because we all have a favoured area in the scope that we like to work on. For me, it's a lot to do with women and children and our 'Water for Schools' program and projects drive the need for safe drinking water very adequately. We have two very innovative partners in supporting the infrastructure and delivery of safe water to schools, 'Waterhealth' and 'Maithiri Aquatech', both very high tech, and sustainable methodologies in the safe water process.

Children below the age of 5 years are the most vulnerable to waterborne diseases and our interventions in low income and underserved communities have been able to take a few steps ahead to alleviate the problem. As per a study from 2017, communities that have the Waterhealth Centres have seen a 21% reduction in waterborne diseases, especially diarrhoea. In addition to our working in the communities, we are working extensively with Government schools and will be spending a lot of time with students helping them understand what safety means for them.