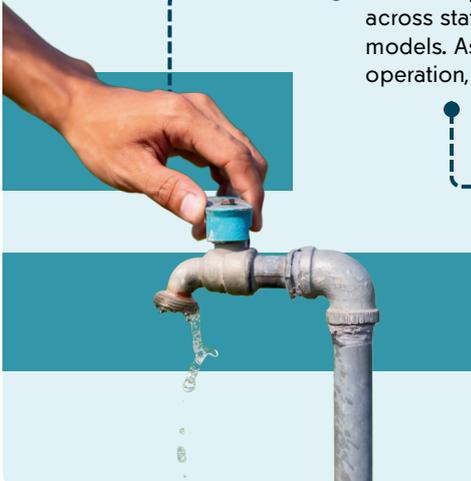# Local Governance and Service Delivery: Emerging Lessons on Rural Water Governance in Odisha and Assam

Rajas Kolhatkar, Alokananda Bisoyi, Kapil Dhabu | **International Innovation Corps (IIC)**

JJM 1.0 rapidly expanded tap coverage across states through diverse implementation models. As schemes transitioned into operation, an important shift became visible.

Infrastructure alone did not ensure reliable water service.

Service reliability began to depend on local capacity for operations and maintenance, monitoring, and institutional oversight, which varied significantly across states.

The challenge shifted from construction to operations.

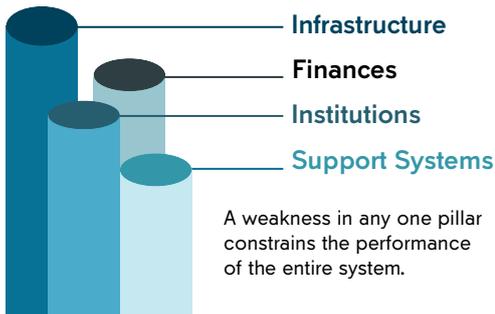## Where the Evidence Comes From?

This study draws on fieldwork conducted across **10 districts: 7 in Assam and 3 in Odisha.**

Insights are grounded in conversations and observations with ~200 stakeholders, including community members, operators, frontline workers, engineers, and local officials.

How Reliable Water Service Is Produced?

Reliable rural water service is **not created by infrastructure alone.** It is produced through the everyday interaction of four system pillars:
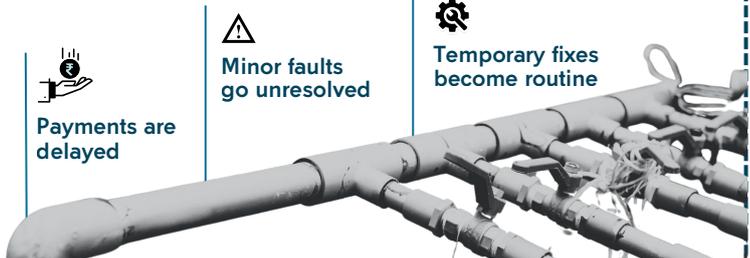
- **Infrastructure**
- **Finances**
- **Institutions**
- **Support Systems**

A weakness in any one pillar constrains the performance of the entire system.

How Operational Failure Emerges?

Water systems rarely fail suddenly. They weaken through **small, everyday operational delays**:

Over time, these small delays accumulate into **chronic disruption**, forcing households to rely on coping arrangements long before the system is formally considered failed.

- **Payments are delayed**
- **Minor faults go unresolved**
- **Temporary fixes become routine**

What We Saw Working on the Ground

ASSAM
- **Jal Baithaks** surfaced issues and enabled coordination
- **Jal Doots** built awareness in schools
- Digital tools improved transparency and financial mobilisation

ODISHA
- **SHGs** conducted basic water quality testing
- **SEM technical cadre** supported repairs beyond JJM infra

Reliability improved where roles, forums, and technical capacity were embedded into routine operations.

Where Accountability and Finance Break the System?

Reliability weakens when:
- Responsibility is diffused
- Operating funds are unstable
- Monitoring and escalation are unclear

Minor faults escalate into chronic failures.

A Governance Toolkit for Service Reliability

To produce reliable service:
- Define success as service reliability, not asset creation
- Ensure predictable operating finance
- Clarify roles and escalation pathways
- Institutionalise monitoring and grievance response
- Give local institutions authority and financial control

JJM 2.0: The Real Challenge Ahead

Infrastructure → Everyday Operations

As coverage saturates, the challenge becomes keeping systems running reliably.

- **Higher state responsibility for opex, payments, and repairs**
- **Greater pressure on institutions and financial systems**

Without strong monitoring and accountability, unreliability will persist.