

# Accessing services

*When two hand-pumps stopped working, putting girls who go to collect water at risk, Shakti girls came together to work with their ward officer to address this protection issue.*



## The Situation

The lack of water supply has far-reaching consequences for children's safety. Girls who should be in school are often sent out to collect water at a considerable distance from their homes, forcing them to drop out of school and putting them at risk of violence and abuse. The lack of usable toilets also means girls and women have to go to the fields or other open areas, increasing their vulnerability to harassment.

## The Solution

Through Shakti, adolescent girls are connected to a peer network, supported and empowered to recognise risk, and develop strategies to resist pressures of child marriage, dangerous work, and being pulled out of school, to access services, negotiate for themselves, and take steps towards achieving their goals.

With the country in the grip of a blistering heat wave, Shakti girls in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, decided to work as a group to tackle their community's chronic water problem.

Bharlai is an urban *basti* in Varanasi. It adjoins the Shivpuri railway station on one side and is located just off the highway from the airport to Varanasi. There is also a truckers' stop, where goods are loaded and unloaded. The location of the community increases the risk of children to violence and abuse, and of being trafficked.

In May, two hand-pumps in the community stopped working. The lack of a proper water supply is a child safety issue as it means children, especially young girls, are usually sent to collect water, often at a considerable distance from their homes. This leaves them unsupervised for long periods of time, and increases the risk of violence and abuse. Moreover, they cannot go to school regularly, and many children drop out. Through our work, we have found that nearly 40% of children are not in school.

The lack of a proper water supply also makes toilets unusable, forcing girls and women to go to the fields or open areas, putting them at high risk of sexual harassment.

Recognising these risks, Shakti girls decided it was time to take action. Working with government, and accessing services is a key aspect of the program, helping girls develop the confidence to engage with local government authorities to drive change for themselves and their communities.

The girls wrote an application to the ward member, asking for new hand-pumps or to have the existing hand-pumps re-bored. They collected the signatures of over 100 people and met the ward member, presenting the letter to him. When the ward member learnt of their community's situation, he immediately informed the municipal corporation. Within four days, hand-pumps in the community were re-bored.