

**Towards Mainstreaming Initiatives for Water and Sanitation:
Experiences for India
Swajadhara (Water) and Total Sanitation Campaign (Sanitation)**

Description of Initiative

Background

One of the major challenges facing India has been providing access to safe drinking water and sanitation, especially in the rural areas. While statistical data indicates that more than 93 per cent of rural habitations have been 'covered' for water supply through various government schemes and programmes, the field-level reality remains that the actual functioning percentage might be quite different. Till recent past the rural water supply systems were designed and executed by the Government Department/Board for the end-users. Demand preferences of the people were generally not taken into account while planning and executing the schemes. Another concern has been the operation and maintenance (O&M) costs for the installed systems, which leads to the problem of sustainability of the water supply or source. The O&M costs built into the schemes are only a fraction of the level required. The total estimated cost of O&M for the installed water supply systems in the country (3.5 million hand pumps and 100,000 piped water supply schemes) through the rural water supply programmes would be around Rs.200 million annually. Whereas the total funds available for O&M are only to the tune of Rs.20 million per year, resulting in a large gap. Moreover, India being a vast country, the assets created spread over a wide area, making it difficult for the Government Departments to maintain them efficiently and effectively, due to both financial and physical constraints. Also the rural population considers the assets as a government property and they do not come forward to maintain it themselves, making the system unsustainable.

Thus, the twin issues of demand-generated services rather than supply one and effective O&M mechanisms need to be addressed. There was a general recognition that a transformation from a target based, supply-driven approach which pays little attention to the actual practices and/or preferences of the end users, to a demand-based approach, where users get the service they want and are willing to pay for, was urgently required. A sustainable solution was to decentralize the system and make the beneficiaries stakeholders in the system, one in which the local community and users are motivated to become stakeholders by sharing a part of the capital cost and also shoulder the full responsibility of O&M and replacement of the installed systems.

To address the above considerations and to make the rural water supply programme a sustainable one, the Sector Reform Programme was launched on a pilot basis in 1999 and was being implemented in 67 Districts of 26 States of the country. The Reforms were innovative and adopted a demand responsive approach based on empowerment of village communities, giving them a decision-making role in the choice of scheme design, control of finances and management arrangements. The programme also included partial capital cost sharing either in cash or kind or both, and 100 per cent responsibility of O&M by users.

Mainstreaming and Sustainability

With success of the sector reforms in the pilot districts, there were demands to scale up the reform initiatives in the sector. According to the expectations and the needs to scale up reforms in the water sector through out the country, the Sector Reforms Programme was improved and launched as Swajaldhara in 2002. The scheme empowers the Panchayati Raj Institutions (village-level local government institutions) and local communities to generate resources and equips them to plan, implement, use, maintain and replace water supply schemes themselves. The scheme also provides full ownership of drinking water assets with appropriate levels of Panchayats and empowers the Panchayats/communities to have the powers to plan, implement, operate, maintain and manage all water supply and sanitation schemes. The scheme places 100% responsibility of operation and maintenance (O&M) to the users and partial capital cost sharing either in cash or kind or both. Thus it marks a shift in the role of Government from direct service delivery to that of planning, policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation, and partial financial support.

The minimum share of community contribution for 40 lpcd service level will be 10 percent of the estimated capital cost of the project. In case of water supply schemes providing more than 40 lpcd, the additional incremental cost would have to be borne by the community. Funding by Government of India would be restricted to 90% of the capital cost of 40 lpcd schemes only. Operation, maintenance and management cost of the water supply schemes will have to be fully borne by the concerned Community/User Group/ Village Water and Sanitation Committee/Panchayati Raj Institution. This would include recurring costs like salary of operators, electricity charges as well as cost of periodic repair and renewal. Gram Panchayats are required to mobilise funds through levy and collection of user charges for the operation and maintenance of the schemes taken over. With these provisions, the financial viability of the scheme as well as sustainable water-supply systems are beginning to be a success.

This innovative scheme (along with the Total Sanitation Campaign, again a scaled up programme for sanitation from the Sector Reforms) and its effective implementation as being demonstrated in the recent years will also help India to achieve more than the MDGs/JPOI target of halving by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Replicating the Initiative

The Sector Reforms initiated in 1999 were basically derived from an experience of more than forty years from different schemes and programmes of water supply 'delivered' by the government. The whole reform process is a major learning in itself where government changed its role from a 'provider' of services to that of a facilitator. It was learned that the conditions under which people would be willing to pay capital cost partially and operate and maintain water supply schemes are (a) if they own the assets, (b) if they have themselves planned and installed the systems and been actively involved throughout in the process, (c) if they have been trained to do simple repairs, (d) if they know the Government will not maintain the asset. The Swajaldhara has taken in learnings from the sector reforms and has been started in 2002 with effective implementation.

The scheme has many possibilities for replication, especially in countries where the water supply and maintenance system is still mostly controlled by the government. Many developing countries can take the lessons and approaches from the sector reforms and the Swajaldhara and adopt it for their own country and needs.

Total Sanitation Campaign

The goal set by the MDGs/JPoI of halving the number of people without access to sanitation by 2015 is planned to be fulfilled by India by 2007. This now seems possible with the successful implementation of the Total Sanitation Campaign which started with the Sector Reforms for water and sanitation sector in 1999. The approach has been to shift towards a 'demand-responsive system' rather than a 'supply' oriented one. Hence the stress is on information, education and communication to emphasizing the need of sanitation facilities. This is coupled with locally available alternative technologies and financially viable options.

Some innovative approaches and tools that help in delivering the targets of TSC include setting up of Rural Sanitary Marts (RSM) and Production Centres (PCs). Gender is a particular focus in the TSC with one of the components being construction of Women Sanitary Complexes. These complexes may be set up in a place in the village acceptable to women and accessible to them. School sanitation is also an important component, wherein special emphasis is laid on toilets for girls in schools.

Of the 138.2 million rural households in India, (2001) nearly 3.3 million have constructed household toilets with support from the TSC. Over 1,700 women's complexes and 41,000 school toilets have been built. Apart from this support facilities such as Rural Sanitary Marts (RSMs) and PCs have been set up. The scale and scope of the TSC has demonstrated the need for a separate national policy related to sanitation and hygiene. This would create more enabling conditions and regulatory frameworks to help fulfill the sanitation targets.
