

Inaugural Address
at
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by
Shri Shanta Kumar
Hon'ble Minister of Rural Development
Government of India

I feel privileged to be with you in the 28th WEDC Conference at Kolkata. This Conference is focusing on water and sanitation-one of the most important subjects, which concerns us in our daily routine life. Water and sanitation are key to a dignified and healthy living. It gives me great pleasure to note that Water, Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC), U.K. is entirely devoted to promote research, applied extension on the subjects relating to the health and well being of people living in both rural and urban areas more specially in Asia and Africa. The WEDC Conferences are being organized in Asia and Africa every alternate year to engage focus of professionals on various issues concerning Water and Sanitation Sector.

The theme of the 28th Conference is "**Sustainable Environment Sanitation and Water Services**". This is one of the most important concerns of the whole World Community today. The 28th WEDC Conference meets here after The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held at Johannesburg during 26th September - 4th October, 2002. The Summit had run a parallel event exclusively on Water and Sanitation and focussed on the Sustainability aspects. It has broadened and strengthened our understanding of the important linkages needed on poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability and the use of natural resources. From Rio to Johannesburg, the Summit has reaffirmed its faith on Sustainable Development and sought for global action to fight poverty and protect environment. Though Rio Conference in 1992 set goals for drinking water it was silent on sanitation. It is heartening to note that increased focus on sanitation issue has been one of the highlights of World Summit. In this context, I am happy to endorse the global WASH (Water and Sanitation Hygiene) Campaign of Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, which has successfully set up the sanitation goals in Johannesburg.

It is very essential that we give focus on the issue of 'Sustainability' without which the whole society will be in danger. The issue of 'Sustainability' can be achieved only after we adopt a sustainable life style i.e. leading a simple and humble life rather than highly materialistic one. Our materialistic desires have led us to over exploitation of our natural resources resulting in their depletion. Let us take the examples of fresh water and forest. Over exploitation of rain forest has led to desertification and over extraction of ground water has been posing drinking water scarcity. Fortunately, we are attending this Conference in Kolkata, West Bengal which is the land of great Saint Swami Rama Krishna Paramhans and his disciple Swami Vivekanand who have shown light to a large number of people seeking bliss. They have given the message for the people to lead simple and sustainable life setting a ceiling on desires. Mahatma Gandhi used to say that the "**Earth has enough to meet our needs but there is little to meet our greed**". In this

perspective, I would like to say that if we have to sustain development we must change our approach to life, we must adopt a humble life style. As we need no moral exhortations to breathe air, we must not need moral exhortations to adopt a simple and sustainable life.

It is worth mentioning that Water, which was once viewed as infinitely renewable and bountiful natural resource, is no longer available in plenty. The countries that were having sufficient fresh water supplies are currently facing problems on account of increasing demand due to population pressure, over exploitation of resources and rapid growth in agriculture and industry besides urbanisation. Coupled with potential impact on global warming and climate changes on Earth's water cycle, the future availability of fresh water appears more difficult than ever before. We have to face these challenges and find out concrete solutions.

The Global Water Resources Scenario in general presents a widening gap between a more or less fixed supply against the ever increasing and unsustainable demand from different sectors. According to the Global Environment Outlook for the year 2000, last decade has seen six-fold rise in the global fresh water consumption. Even then, roughly 20 per cent of the world's population or 1.2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water. Most of them live in Asia and Africa alone. Global population is expected to reach 8 billion by 2020 and most of them would be in the developing countries. This will lead to a decline in per capita availability of arable land and clean water. For example, in India, per capita water availability was over 5,000 cubic meters per annum in 1950. Now, it stands at about 2,000 cubic meters and it is estimated that by 2025, per capita availability would be around 1500 cubic meters.

During last 30 years, all over the world there has been a massive anthropogenic change in the hydrological cycle of rivers and lakes affecting their water quality, their potential as water resources and water budget. Their spatial and temporal distribution, is determined not only by natural climate variations but also by man's economic activities. In many parts of the world, water resources have become so depleted and contaminated that they are already unable to meet the ever-increasing demands made on them. Much of the irrigation depends on underground water supply, which are being pumped out more rapidly than they are being recharged. Water availability, water use efficiency and associated problems such as ground water depletion, salinization, pollution, contamination, etc., are going to be serious in this millennium.

India has an average annual surface flow of 1869 Billion Cubic Metres (BCM) out of which the estimated utilizable flow is only 690 BCM. Taking into account the total ground water resource of 431 BCM, the total estimated utilizable surface ground water thus stands at 1121 BCM. Our population is increasing continuously at the growth rate of 1.8 per cent. The water demand, therefore, is bound to increase. It is evident that the demand for fresh water from different sectors has been growing against a more or less fixed availability, resulting in scarcity situation in different parts of our country. The water distress situation is experienced especially in 1174 blocks in 204 desert and drought prone districts. Apart from the increasing **mismatch in the supply - demand scenario, gross mismanagement** of water resources, coupled with negligence of the water resource environment have further aggravated the situation. The result is reflected in the form of falling water levels, degradation of water quality and prevalence of water borne diseases in some areas in the country. We need, therefore, to allocate water most judiciously to ensure **water security, food security, livelihood security, health security** and

ecological security.

It is a matter of great pride that **rural water supply in our country is the largest of its kind in the world** and we have achieved significant progress in the water supply sector due to sustained efforts by the Governments, both at the Centre and in the States. An impressive achievement is the coverage of **about 99%** habitations with safe drinking water through **3.7 million hand pumps** and more than **1.37 lakh piped water supply schemes**. We have accorded high priority to cover all rural habitations with **access to safe drinking water by 2004**. For this purpose, we are implementing one of the largest water supply programmes in the world through Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP). Annually, we are providing to the State Governments more than Rs. 22 billion as Central share alone.

Although, we have achieved significant coverage of drinking water in rural and urban areas, we are concerned about two pressing problems namely (a) Sustainability of sources and systems, and (b) **water quality**. In order to ensure **Sustainable** Water Supply, we have to achieve two tasks (i) ensuring sustainability of the sources and (ii) ensuring Sustainability of Systems. In order to ensure Sustainability of Sources, we are launching a massive programme relating to Rain Water Harvesting, Re-chargability of ground water etc., with people participation throughout the country. In order to ensure Sustainability of Systems, we are implementing a demand driven reform initiative based on community participation which has already been taken up in 67 districts of the country with an outlay of more than Rs. 20 Billion. We are shortly going to expand this initiative throughout the country.

I have dealt with sustainability issues. Now, I would dwell on quality issues. Accelerated extraction of ground water, coupled with extensive use of chemical fertilizers in agriculture, apart from affecting the sustainability of the sources has also brought to surface a number of chemical contamination problems. Excess fluoride, iron, arsenic, brackishness and nitrate, besides bacteriological contamination, presently pose health hazards in some parts of the country. A survey done few years back revealed that India had 2.17 lakh rural habitations having these water quality problems. In West Bengal, arsenic is posing serious problem. Both Central and State Governments are funding to provide surface water access to more than 3,550 habitations. Majority of them have been provided with alternative potable water sources. I assure the Chief Minister of West Bengal that all their efforts will be supported by us in the Government of India to overcome arsenic problem in a time bound manner. In December, we are holding an International Conference of South East Asian countries at Kolkata on arsenic mitigation in order to draw up protocols for arsenic mitigation technologies. Further, we are committed to set up a National Resource Centre on Arsenic Mitigation at Kolkata primarily for the water problem in West Bengal. International community and other countries can avail the applied research and technological facilities from this Centre.

Rural Sanitation is one of the important concerns in India as well as in whole world community. Although, significant achievements have been made in providing safe drinking water, only 60% people across the globe are having improved sanitation coverage. This means about 2.4 billion people in the world are yet to get improved sanitation facilities and 80% of such people live in rural areas. Unfortunately, the majority of them live in Asia and Africa and particularly in India and China. In India, we have only 20% sanitation coverage in rural areas and 36% overall, which is very poor

from our own standards. During the World Summit on Sustainable Development, a goal has been set up to reduce the uncovered population by 50% by the year 2015. We aim to achieve the goal by 2007. We have launched a Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) to promote rural sanitation in the whole country. TSC is being implemented on campaign mode involving people's participation and triggering demand through IEC. We have sanctioned 185 such projects with a total outlay of Rs. 20 billion. In this regard, I appreciate the efforts taken by the Government of West Bengal in meeting the sanitation challenges. Government of West Bengal has taken a lead role in the whole country in promoting rural sanitation. I understand, **Nandigram-II Block** in Medinipur district of West Bengal is the first block in the country to have achieved the full sanitation coverage. Many more will follow in near future. I am confident that Government of India with the active participation of State Governments and Panchayati Raj Institutions will make a marked difference in rural sanitation coverage in India.

I hope, the 28th WEDC Conference will be able to discuss the issues I have flagged in water and sanitation sector. I wish your deliberations in the Conference all success. With these words, I inaugurate this 28th WEDC Conference.

Jai Hind