



सत्यमेव जयते

शान्तनु कंसल
SHANTANU CONSUL

सचिव
भारत सरकार
ग्रामीण विकास मंत्रालय
पेय जल आपूर्ति विभाग
Secretary

Government of India
Ministry of Rural Development
Department of Drinking Water Supply
247- 'A' Wing Nirman Bhawan, New Delhi- 110108
Tel.: 23061207, 23061245 Fax: 23062715
E-mail : secydw@nic.in

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Drinking water security to rural people on long-term basis
Lessons from strategy and approach followed in Gujarat – WASMO

Dear

Recently, I visited Gujarat and saw various work relating to drinking water supply and sanitation in remote villages of Kutch and Surendranagar districts, which fall in drought prone desert areas and also face the problem of chemical contamination of ground water. During the visit, I discussed the State's approach in water sector with Government officials, representatives of civil society/ NGOs, academicians and above all, with the local community in their villages. I was impressed with the holistic approach followed in the State to overcome the perpetual water scarcity and would like to share some of the learnings with you.

2. In the wake of severe drought in the year 2000, the State started working on long-term water security to get out of the morass of repeated emergency measures. With water becoming available from Sardar Sarovar dam, they planned a state-wide water grid to transfer water from South Gujarat to water scarce areas in North and East Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch. They also started rejuvenating their defunct regional water supply schemes by inter-connecting with other schemes and supplying Narmada water. However, this is a fall back option. The true success lies in the fact that the state focused on capturing peoples' imagination and channelizing their energy to enable them to take over the responsibility of water management at the village level, in which State played the role of a true facilitator with a sense of purpose. It provided huge space to its people to play their role in the gigantic task of achieving water security. In the process, the State was able to facilitate growth of well informed, responsible, performing leadership at the village level ready to shoulder the overall responsibility of community development at the grassroot level. In 2002, they worked out their strategy and adopted an approach in the rural drinking water sector, which can be summarized as under :

- i.) Gram Panchayats/ it's sub-committee i.e. Pani Samitis (Village Water & Sanitation Committee) to shoulder the full responsibility to develop, manage and protect their local water sources; plan, construct and manage in-village water supply systems; collect water tariffs, carry out water testing, keep surveillance on water sources and take innovative measures to ensure safe and clean drinking water to all on long-term basis. Pani Samiti has been given powers to receive grant, carry out works, levy tariff and penalty, etc. under the Panchayati Raj Act;

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- i.) The local water source(s) has been acknowledged as primary source of safe drinking water on long-term basis and water supplied from long distance through grid/ regional water supply system is only a fall back option during lean period. However, it is emphasized that the conjunctive use of water i.e. rainwater, ground water, local surface water and water drawn from the grid is essential to achieve water security.
- ii.) In case of water deficient areas including quality-affected areas, it is the responsibility of the State or its agencies to provide safe water at the doorstep of the villages and thereafter within the village, it is the local community/ Gram Panchayat/ Pani Samiti, which is responsible for overall management of water within the village. If local community is taking water from the grid, they have to pay, of course at a subsidized rate. This is to bring in a sense of responsibility and encourage local community to develop their own water sources in the villages for which State provides funds.
- iii.) Drinking water sector has been unbundled and there is clear delineation of role among various agencies, viz.
 - a.) For developing large-sized water infrastructure and to handle bulk water transfer across the State, Gujarat Water Infrastructure Limited (GWIL) has been set up as a company registered under the Companies Registration Act, and works on commercial principle;
 - b.) For treating and handling water distribution work up to the village boundary, there is Gujarat Water Supply & Sewerage Board (GWSSB) created under the State Act; and
 - c.) To assist/ facilitate and to provide financial assistance to villages to develop their own water sources, water supply systems and its management, operation and maintenance, an organization known as Water and Sanitation Management Organization (WASMO) has been set up as a society under the Societies (Registration) Act. It also functions as State Water and Sanitation Mission (SWSM).
- iv.) WASMO has been given great flexibility to develop its own rules and regulations along with procedural freedom to select right personnel, partner NGOs, scheme selection and approval process, funding mechanism, etc. to meet its specific goal. As an institution its approach/ strategy to address specific problems has been very different from that of a typical PHED/ Water Board/ Corporation.

4. The main objective behind setting up of WASMO has been to prepare the village community to shoulder the responsibility by providing all kinds of support so that long-term sustainability – source, system, financial and social, in the drinking water sector is achieved. In the process, certain negotiable and non-negotiable issues have been identified and followed up. To encourage people to shoulder the responsibility of in-village water resource and drinking water management and to strengthen their local water sources, full financial and technical support has been provided. WASMO also provides a model for engaging civil society on a large scale to empower and build the capacities of local community to shoulder the responsibility of drinking water, hygiene and sanitation. Empowerment of village community has been done on a massive scale to the extent that they are planning, implementing, managing, operating and maintaining water supply systems in addition to carrying out water quality testing and taking financial responsibility.

5. More than 75 NGOs have been roped in as implementation support agencies (ISAs) in those areas where they were already working and provided key support to the whole initiative. These ISAs have been the key links between village people and authorities in the scaled up programme. Village community with the help of WASMO and NGOs develop their Village Action Plan (VAP) and after techno-economic appraisal, Pani Samiti implements all the components including hardware and are fully responsible for the same. WASMO provides funds and facilitates the process with the help of NGO. WASMO does not itself get into construction activities. Trust factor between all partners is very high and financial matters are handled by Pani Samitis without any interference and unsolicited guidance either from NGOs and or WASMO. Started with 82 villages in 2002, the approach has been universalized in the whole State and out of 18,600 villages Pani Samitis are active in about 14,000 villages.

6. Some excellent manuals/ systems have been developed and made available to GPs/ Pani Samitis/ ISAs. Concurrent auditing is done through specialized team. The decision making process at village level has been very participatory and women are in the forefront. Technologies have been demystified and even illiterate or semi literate rural people are able to understand and appreciate these technologies as they are managing the systems. An elaborate system for techno-economic appraisals has been developed and put in place for selection of the appropriate technologies. People understand various aspects of water quality and are able to carry out tests to determine the water quality. WASMO has developed a system to follow up the checks and facilitate various actions for tackling quality problem. One very interesting feature is that in WASMO, more than 1/3rd staff are from social sciences/ rural development/ social work background and are involved in community mobilization. There are people who are developmental and communication experts. Only 30% of it's total staff are engineers.

7. It would be desirable that in accordance with the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, the local community and their local self-government i.e. Gram Panchayat or its sub-committee are given their rightful place to shoulder the full responsibility of local water resource management, water supply and sanitation. While implementing the new approach in the rural drinking water sector in the state, you may like to strengthen the State Water and Sanitation Mission on the lines of WASMO which provides intellectual leadership, works as a think tank and supports the GPs/ local communities/ Pani Samitis/ VWSCs in their pursuit to become self-dependent in water supply and sanitation. In the process, focus has shifted from mere construction and infrastructure development to various aspects which ensure safe drinking water to all on long-term basis and WASMO on behalf of the Government is playing the role of a facilitator rather than a provider.

8. I am sure that in your endeavour to achieve drinking water security to all on a long-term basis, lessons learnt from WASMO will be useful. The approach followed by WASMO has been widely acknowledged and it has been awarded the Prime Minister's Civil Service Award as well United Nations Public Service Award. You may like to use this validated approach/ model with suitable modifications to meet the special requirement of your state to ensure that GPs/ VWSCs/ Pani Samitis/ local community start shouldering the full

responsibility of drinking water, local water resource management, improved sanitation, hygiene, etc. thus bringing in long-term sustainability in the sector. But please remember replicating WASMO or an organization akin to it will require taking brave decisions and adopting a dynamic approach.

A copy of the tour report will be available on the Department's website.

With regards,

Yours sincerely



(Shantanu Consul)

To

Secretary
Rural Water Supply
All States/UTs