

LAUNCHING OF SECTOR REFORMS WATER SUPPLY PROJECT AND TOTAL  
SANITATION CAMPAIGN PROJECT IN COIMBATORE DISTRICT  
(Coimbatore, 9 September 2000)

Key Note Address by Shri S. K. Tripathi Secretary to the Government of India Ministry  
of Rural Development Department of Drinking Water Supply

It is my privilege and pleasure to be here today in this pleasant environment for participating in this function organised to symbolise the launch of Sector Reforms Water Supply Project and Total Sanitation Campaign Project in District Coimbatore. These projects are being implemented to ensure community participation in the rural water supply and sanitation sector.

Despite the impressive coverage of the rural habitations, there is still scarcity of drinking water in the rural areas, especially during the summer months. Quality of the available water, which has been contaminated chemically and biologically in many places, has been a matter of great concern. Efforts have been made to concentrate on measures to check water quality problems, but the situation far greater attention. An extensive survey is now being carried out by the States to assess the exact magnitude of the quality problem in various parts of the country.

Another major concern for the Government in the rural water supply sector is sustainability of the sources and of the systems. Excessive withdrawal of ground water for various purposes and total neglect of rain-water harvesting, watershed management, water conservation measures etc. have also had their adverse impact on the sustainability of water sources. This has led to rapid depletion of ground water level in many parts of the country. It is imperative that top-most priority be accorded to rain-water harvesting, watershed management and water conservation measures. In fact, the Government has already taken a policy decision to earmark 25% of the Sub-Mission funds under ARWSP for such measures.

Today, water is perceived by the rural public as a social right to be provided free of cost by the Government, rather than as a scarce resource which must be managed locally as an economic good in order to ensure its effective use. In the planning and implementation of the Government programmes, there has been little or no involvement of the community, which leads to poor operation and maintenance practices. As a result, the resource gap between demand and requirement has been increasing.

Till yet, we have achieved considerable coverage i.e. 82% habitations have been fully covered and 16% partially covered as per present norms. However, the twin problems of ensuring sustainability of the systems created and also ensuring sustainability of their sources has been haunting the minds of all of us for the past few years. As you are all aware, the National Agenda for Governance of the Government envisages to provide safe drinking water to all habitations in five years. If what is envisaged is only achieving coverage of the remaining 16% partially covered and 2% non-covered habitations, then it would not be a problem at all. Considerable amount of funds has been allocated for the

drinking water supply sector in the last few years. If the trend continues, we would have sufficient funds to ensure 100% coverage without much difficulty. But the real problem is ensuring sustainability of the systems created. It is with this aspect in view that the Government has introduced major policy reforms in the sector. Consequently, 58 districts, which have been identified by the State Governments, have been taken up for implementation of this Reforms Agenda. Projects in respect of most of the districts have been prepared and approved. Funds for most of them have also been released. So, now our goal should be to ensure that these projects are successfully implemented.

These projects are different from the traditional projects for implementation of various other schemes. The objective of these projects are not just to implement the hardware component of a water supply scheme, like installing a handpump or a piped water supply scheme, but to implement a particular philosophy and concept.

In this new concept the Government will primarily function as a facilitator instead of provider. The new programme will be a decentralised demand driven peoples' programme. In the pilot districts the community would plan, implement, and manage the drinking water supply schemes so that they have a feeling of ownership of the assets created. The schemes would be implemented through the user's committees involving Panchayati Raj Institutions. The community will also operate and maintain the schemes.

This concept has already been experimented in different parts of the country. One of the successful examples of community participation in rural drinking water supply is that of SWAJAL Project in Uttar Pradesh. There are similar other experiences available in other States also.

As these are process projects, which are being implemented by the Government with peoples' participation, all of us will learn together about the various aspects of the project during the course of their implementation. We may continue to make mid-course corrections to the strategy as and when it is required.

The funds for implementation of these projects would henceforth be released by the Government of India directly to the concerned districts. The project would commence with awareness campaigns and training programmes where the rural people would be exposed to the concept of the reforms and would be demystified about the rural water supply technology by educating them about various options available and their respective cost structure so as to facilitate them to choose the most optimal, cost-effective and affordable technology which would suit their requirements and also satisfy their need. Thus the users will decide about the technology to be adopted and the service level that they require. The people will themselves implement the scheme or will decide about the implementing agency. The community itself would plan, implement, manage, operate and maintain the schemes of their choice.

The training programme is expected to equip, on one hand, the administrative agencies about the behavioural aspect for interaction with people, messages to be delivered, importance of traditional schemes and techniques to train the villagers on various aspects of reforms and its implementation etc. and, on the other, it will equip the villagers to themselves implement, manage, operate and maintain the schemes of their choice. Actual implementation of the physical scheme will follow. Such schemes would be on the basis of demand generated as a consequence of the awareness and training

campaigns. The generation of demand will, of course, be indicated by the willingness of the people to participate in the implementation, management, operation and maintenance and also by the proportion of capital share they contribute in each village. I am sure that such a joint effort where the actual beneficiaries/ users, Village Panchayat, District Panchayat/ administration, State Government agencies and the Government of India work together, would ensure that the cherished objective of institutionalising a satisfactory and sustainable rural water supply system is achieved.

Before I conclude, I would like to briefly mention about the Total Sanitation Campaign which is also being launched in Coimbatore district simultaneously. The Central Rural Sanitation Programme has been restructured from 1st April, 1999. The State/Union Territories are now required to formulate Total Sanitation Campaign projects in the selected 58 Pilot Districts in the country. These are the same districts which have been taken up under the Sector Reforms Water Supply projects. For these projects a new strategy has been formulated laying emphasis on IEC activities, alternate delivery mechanism and beneficiary participation. The restructured Programme adopts a 'demand driven' approach giving the various technological options to the beneficiaries. School sanitation has been given special focus under the Programme to generate awareness for the better acceptance of sanitation in the rural areas.

Amongst the 58 pilot districts selected for the implementation of the Total Sanitation Campaign in the country, 46 projects amounting to more than Rs. 500 crores have already been sanctioned. In Tamil Nadu, 4 TSC projects have also been sanctioned for the Districts of Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Perambalure and Vellore. The major component of these four projects are construction of about 3.7 lakhs individual latrines for BPL households, 8,046 school/balwadis toilets, 117 sanitary complexes for women and 34 Rural Sanitary Marts.

I hope that the people of Coimbatore would ensure that this peoples' programme is implemented successfully in the district so that others can follow their example.

Thank you.