



Village-based Management of Water Supply and Sanitation in Tamil Nadu

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Background

The coverage of domestic water supply in rural areas in the state of Tamil Nadu, India, is impressive. The Government, through centralized implementation, has provided either motor-driven or hand pump schemes from borewells or open wells in 99% of the 80,421 hamlets. Out of these 63% have a theoretical supply of at least 20 litres per capital per day (lpcd) and 36% over 40 lpcd¹.

As in many other developing countries the expected level of service has not been reached due to deficiencies in operation and maintenance of the systems. The capital invested is eroded as gradual deterioration of the facilities is taking place. Inadequate government financial and technical support, low quality of work, inadequate management capacity and lack of popular involvement and ownership are often cited as reasons for this situation.

The Water and Sanitation Project in Tamil Nadu, assisted by Danida

The Project started in late 1996 in two districts, Cuddalore and Villupuram, with an aggregate population of slightly over 4 million (2001). Initially the project concentrated on, what at the time in Tamil Nadu, were new concepts of demand-driven, participatory approach and community financial contribution for the rehabilitation of physical installations. Simultaneously capacity building for the technical maintenance of the facilities took place. After successful introduction and implementation of these new ideas the focus from late 2001 has been on the building of management structures for the long-term sustainability of the water and sanitation systems.

Existing institutions and legislation in Tamil Nadu

The structure of local government in Tamil Nadu, and in India as a whole, is laid down in the Constitution, amendment 73 of 1992². It stipulates a three-tier system of democratically elected local governments, namely the District Panchayat, the Union Panchayat and the Village Panchayat, (VP) (also called Gram Panchayat). This is usually referred to as the Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI).

The VP comprises elected Village President and ward members representing different parts of the VP. The Grama Sabha, a village council open to all registered voters of the village, has the power to oversee and approve the actions of the VP.

The devolution of powers and responsibilities is laid down in the state-specific Panchayat Act of 1994³ and the Panchayat Rules of 1999⁴ regulate the internal organization and responsibilities of the VP and Grama Sabha. The VP has been given the responsibility to operate the domestic water supply systems in its area of jurisdiction. The State Government through the Districts and Blocks give financial and technical support to the VPs. An important Government Order of December 1998⁵ regulates the use of and payment for house-service connections in rural areas.

The PRI system is relatively new and a lot remains to be done before it can function as intended. Many government activities take place outside the PRI system and there are still diverse political views about its final shape.

In Tamil Nadu there are 12,619 VPs with an average population of 2,500. In the two Project districts there are an average of 3.5 habitations (hamlets) per VP.

Community management – by whom and why?

There is a consensus among the leading actors in the rural water and sanitation sector in Tamil Nadu that community management should increase. There are not yet consensus about which community should be in charge. Those who have less belief in the government and the PRI system favour management by water associations, user groups, self-help groups, farmers' clubs etc. Others think that the individual hamlets should manage their own facilities. A third group believes that the VPs are best suited to manage the facilities to obtain the long-term sustainability that all desire. Each model has its own merits. The Project holds the view⁶ that the VPs should manage the facilities; and the main arguments for this are shown in the box. It must be stressed that community management is not only a concept to increase the effectiveness of water supply systems, it is also based on a belief in participation and democracy.

The Vision

A coherent vision of a village-based management system (VMS) developed in the Project is seen in Figure 1. At the center is the users/community members who are aware of their rights and responsibilities and who can demand required service and pay for it. They participate actively in the management in user groups and through their representation in a Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC). The VWSC works within the framework of the VP and is able to finance at least O&M and minor expansions. It receives external assistance from the private commercial sector, the State and the government district and block (Union) organizations and the civil society.

The Village Water and Sanitation Committee

The VWSC (Figure 2) is the focal point of the model. Its composition, function, powers and responsibilities are regulated in a by law. By-laws also regulate distribution, payment for services and sanctions for violating the rules. Standard model by-laws (Figure 3) are modified to suit each VP and adopted by the Grama Sabha. The elected VP, Community Based Organisations and resourceful persons in the village are members of the VWSC as decided by the Grama Sabha. Members from the VWSC or employees form groups for quality assurance of constructions and installations. Others focus on the protection of water sources, sanitation and cleanliness of the village. User Groups and employees like the Panchayat Clerk, Hand Pump Mechanics and Power Pump Operator perform duties as directed by the VWSC.

Capacity Building

The capacity building was initially done in 10 model VPs by Project staff comprising extension officers and engineers deputed from the Government as well as Danida employed staff. Later the Gandhigram Rural Institute was deployed and the 35 Block Development Offices (BDO) were more involved to supplement the Project for scaling-up the establishment of VMS to 300

- Arguments for Management by the Village Panchayat**
- The constitutional PRI system and the existing legislation in Tamil Nadu are adhered to
 - The VP is democratically elected and it accountable to higher levels of the Government institutions
 - The VP already receive financial and technical support from the State
 - Hamlets are too many to receive training and too small to maintain a management structure
 - Equitable service for all groups and habitations can be best achieved if the VP has the overall responsibility
 - Through the entry point of water and sanitation the VP will strengthen its management capability in all other areas of village administration
 - Other community based organizations can co-operate within the framework of the VP
 - Scaling up of the implementation of a VP management system can be made within the government system
 - Similar systems of democratically elected local governments with responsibility for basic amenities exist in most (all?) economically successful countries.

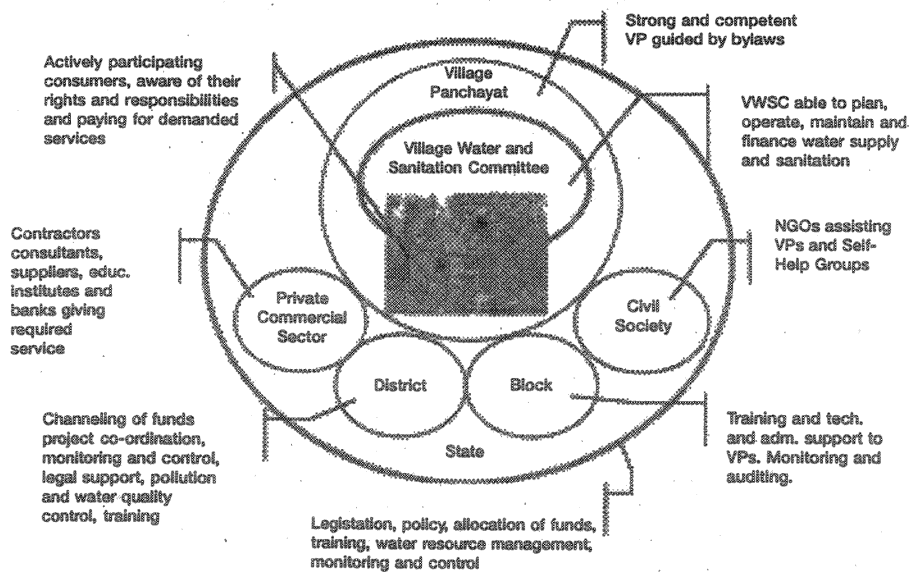


Fig 1 : The Vision of a Village-based Management System

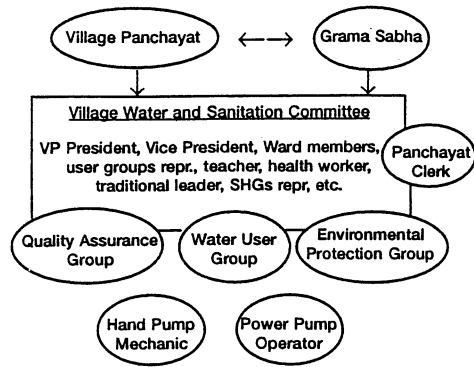


Fig 2 : The Village Water and Sanitation Committee.

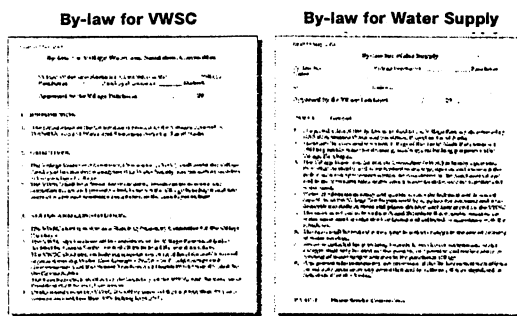


Fig 3 : Standard model by-laws.

VPs. Training packages have been developed by the Project. An overview of the formal training given to the VPs is shown in Figure 4. Besides the courses extensive assistance is given in the villages for analysis of the facilities and regularization of the house-service connections. Mass awareness campaigns are also held. Special capacity building is given to the Block Development Water and Sanitation Committees that also have been formed on the initiative of the Project. Cross-cutting issues such as transparent management, gender awareness, equitable services to and involvement of all segments of the panchayat are stressed in all training modules.

Experience

The reception of the concept in the VPs has gone from hesitancy to enthusiasm in most of the first 10 model villages. The by-laws, the regularization of house-service connection, the revenue collection system and the various training courses are generally very much appreciated by villagers and village officials alike. VWSCs and sub-groups have been formed and have regular monthly meetings in all model VPs. The financial constraints in the State budget resulting in late or reduced distribution of government grants have helped convince people about the necessity of user payment. Payment for use of house-service has been enforced and illegal

Module	Content	Duration
General Orientation	VMS concept Health & Hygiene, By laws	1 day
General Management	Participatory Planning, Leadership Communication, Conflict Resolution Group Dynamics	2 days
Financial Management	Planning & Budgeting Organisation, Revenue collection Administration, Controlling, Monitoring	2 days
Technical Management	Environmental Protection Quality Assurance Water User Group	1 day 1 day 1 day
Technical Skills	Hand Pump Mechanics Power Pump Operator Mason (latrines) Plumbing	5 days 4 days 4 days 1 day

Figure 4 : Formal Training Courses

connections weeded out. Even penalties for late payment are levied and paid in some villages. The so far voluntary payment for the use of communal water points has taken off in about half the model villages. Considerable input is required to achieve this. Besides 20 man days by the BDOs, he required input from external agencies for establishing the VMS during the scaling-up stage is 30 man days at a cost of about Rs. 22,000/- per village. This constitutes about 8% of the typical rejuvenation cost for the water supply installations in the project area or about 1-2% of the total replacement value of the existing installations. The time spent and costs during the development and testing of the VMS model by the Project exceeded these figures about 2-3 times. There are several hurdles to overcome. Willingness to charge has been found to be a more serious obstacle than willingness to pay in some VPs. Obsolete Government orders and regulations and a centralistic inclination of the administration still slow down the process of building functioning institutions at the VP level. Bailing out by the Government of VPs defaulting on the payment for electricity petty restrictions of the powers of the VPs to spend without authorization from higher quarters

hamper the devolution of powers and responsibilities to the VPs. However, scaling-up has become easier than expected as the news about the model VMS villages has spread. An observed spontaneous adoption of by-laws and regularization of house service connections in non-project VPs adjacent to Project VPs indicate that the chosen model is working.

The interest and support from the State Government and the District have been encouraging. The District Collectors (Head of Districts) and Project Officers (District Rural Development Agency) are formally in charge of the implementation and participate personally to great extent in formulation and execution of the project. The BDOs have, after initial hesitation, become more and more involved and give invaluable support during capacity building and the regularisation of house-service connections. Other sector reform projects e.g. the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission have adopted essential parts of the concept and the World Bank has shown great interest.

Conclusion

The VMS concept is very promising. Yet the eventual success of the VMS concept will only be known after several years. When the Project closes down in March 2004 we should be able to make good projection of the prospects. The progress and experience until then can

be followed on www.wstamilnadu.org where more detailed information about the Project is available.

References

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