

# **RURAL WATER SUPPLY: ANALYSING THE SWAJALDHARA PROJECT**

*(UP Rural Water Supply and Environmental Sanitation Project)*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Clean drinking water is a basic necessity of life. Supply of clean drinking water in the rural areas has always been one of the highest priorities of the government. Availability of potable water in rural areas is strongly interlinked with rural development and growth and displays direct, positive results for human health and well-being, especially for women and children.

Uttar Pradesh is affected by Water scarcity with 63% habitations receiving less than the Government of India prescribed basis service level of 40 lpcd. Rural Water Supply systems range from traditional open wells and hand pumps to piped water supply schemes with treatment plants and private connections. In India, the rural water supply and sanitation (RWSS) service is as close to the definition of a public good as is possible therefore almost the entire sector is financed by public funds. The sources of drinking water in rural India are quite diverse ranging from dug wells and hand pumps (often privately owned) to electric motor driven pumps pumping water to overhead storage tanks releasing supplies through a distribution system to a smaller community or an entire village. Hand pumps continue to be the largest source of public drinking water followed by single village schemes and open dug wells.

The water crisis is largely our own making. It has resulted not from the natural limitations of the water supply or lack of financing and appropriate technologies, even though these are important factors, but rather from profound failures in water governance.... Consequently, resolving the challenges in this area must be a key priority if we are to achieve sustainable water resources development and management.

**—UNDP on Water Governance**

In these 60 years of independence, Indian government investment in rural water supply and sanitation had been supply driven and top down. But poor operation and maintenance (O&M) was causing a number of water supply systems to fail, and water was seen by rural communities

not as a scarce socioeconomic resource requiring local management, but as a social right to be provided free of cost by the government. A comprehensive review of water resource management in India concluded that 'India faces an increasingly crucial situation; its limited water resources are stressed and depleting while its demands are growing rapidly in different sectors', and that 'replacement costs of water supply hardware are decreasing several times in the available budget'.

In December 2002, the Government of India launched the Swajaldhara programme for national rural drinking-water supply, based on principles of community management, demand responsiveness and participation of beneficiaries. Swajaldhara had been piloted since 1999 through the Sector Reform Pilot Projects (SRPPs) in 67 districts in 26 (out of 29) Indian states. Implemented by the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission (RGNDWM) of the Ministry of Rural Development, it is a huge step and a bold break from the past. One of the highest priorities of the Indian government has always been supply of clean drinking water in the rural areas. There always has been a strong link between availability of potable water and rural development and growth in rural areas. It exhibits a direct, positive relation between human health and well-being, especially for women and children. The Department of Drinking Water Supply was created in October 1999 to concentrate on the goal of providing safe drinking water to all the rural villages in the next five years, as was mentioned in the National Agenda, 1999, for Governance of the Government of India. The Tenth Plan bestowed the highest priority to provide the 'Not Covered' (NC) habitations with sustainable and specified supply of drinking water. It was visualized to cover all the rural habitations including those which might have been slipped back to Not Covered /Partially Covered category by the end of the plan period.

## **THE SWAJALDHARA PROGRAMME**

Accredited as the flagship reform programme in the rural drinking water sector, Swajaldhara was launched on 25 December 2002 by the Prime Minister of the country, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee. It was seen as the convergence of initiatives taken by the national government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the external support agencies to promote the community led Participatory approach in rural drinking water supply initiative (GoI 2003). The programme underlined community participation in the planning and implementation phases. It introduced the concept of demand management, whereby the community will be able to 'choose' appropriate and affordable technology. It also placed user value on water through a 10 per cent community contribution in the planning phase and monthly water rentals to maintain the water infrastructure. It therefore marked a gradual shift towards the role of community participation and a decentralised pattern of service delivery, with the government playing the role of facilitator (World Bank 2006). A basic underlying assumption of the scheme was that cost sharing would enable participation and implementation of water asset ownership.

It noted:

Management of water resources for diverse uses should incorporate a participatory approach; involving not only various governmental agencies but also stakeholders, in an effective and decisive manner, in various aspects of planning, design, development and management of water resources schemes (GoI 2002:5). The reform principle in Swajaldhara was actually aimed at strengthening the structure of local governance by generating robust institutions of service delivery (Naidu 2002). Community participation and local governance were not regarded as competing paradigms but were tied in a synergistic relationship, where empowered communities could help in effective rural governance

Uttar Pradesh is affected by Water scarcity with 63% habitations receiving less than the Government of India prescribed basis service level of 40 litres lpcd per day. Rural Water Supply systems range from traditional open wells and hand pumps to piped water supply schemes with treatment plants and private connections. The capital cost of these rural water schemes is fully subsidized by the Government. The operation and maintenance cost, through theoretically chargeable to the users, is also in effect almost fully subsidized by the Government. Maintenance of rural water supply systems is not of a high standard, with about one-third of rural water supply systems out of operation at any given time.

## **SWAJALDHARA**

In the year 1999 various reforms in the rural drinking water sector were adopted and have been scaled up throughout the country in the form of Swajaldhara **launched on 25th December 2002**, through Sector Reform Project (SRP) on pilot basis. The programme is a exemplar shift from supply driven to demand driven, centralized to decentralized implementation and Government's role from service provider to facilitator. The Swajaldhara scheme adheres to fundamental reform principles based on a demand-responsive approach with community participation, adhered to by state governments and implementing agencies. It is based on empowerment of villagers to ensure their full participation in the project through a decision making role in the choice of the drinking water scheme, planning, design, implementation, control of finances, management arrangements including full ownership of drinking water assets.

## **PRINCIPLES**

Swajaldhara has certain fundamental reform principles mentioned as below, which need to be adhered to by the State Governments and the Implementing Agencies:-

- adopting a demand-responsive, adaptable approach along with community participation based on empowerment of villagers to ensure their full participation in the project through a decision making role in the choice of the drinking water scheme, its planning, designing, implementing & control of finances and management arrangements;
- complete ownership of drinking water assets with appropriate levels of Panchayats,

- Panchayats / communities should have the powers to plan, implement, operate, maintain and manage all Water Supply and Sanitation schemes,
- partial capital cost sharing either in cash or kind including labour or both, 100% responsibility of operation and maintenance (O&M) by the users ;
- an integrated service delivery mechanism ;
- taking up of conservation measures for sustained drinking water supply, through rain water harvesting and ground water recharge systems; and
- Shift in the role of Government from direct service delivery to that of planning, policy formulation, monitoring, evaluation and partial financial support.

Swajaldhara will have two Dharas (streams). First Dhara (Swajaldhara I) will be for a Gram Panchayat (GP) or a group of GPs or an intermediate Panchayat (at Block / Tehsil level) and the Second Dhara (Swajaldhara II) will have a District as the Project area.

### **Swajaldhara-I**

States can implement Swajaldhara in Blocks / Gram Panchayats in the districts outside the Swajaldhara II project districts. In such cases all the fundamental reform principles are to be followed in those areas. Thus, the lowest unit for implementing the reform initiative under Swajaldhara-I would be a Gram Panchayat. A group of Gram Panchayats or the Intermediate Panchayat could also come up with project proposals. Swajaldhara-I being primarily for a Gram Panchayat should normally have small drinking water schemes. Multi-Gram Panchayat schemes, while not prohibited, would require specific and precise formulation of capital cost sharing, operation and maintenance arrangements and cost collection mechanisms.

Specific proposals under Swajaldhara-I will be sanctioned by the District Water and Sanitation Committee (DWSC) provided the projects conform to the Guidelines of Swajaldhara.

If more than 50% of Blocks/Gram Panchayats in any particular District opt for rural water supply schemes under Swajaldhara-I, the State Government could consider posing / taking up the entire District under Swajaldhara-II to the State Water and Sanitation Mission (SWSM).

### **Swajaldhara-II**

The District is the unit for implementing the reform initiative under Swajaldhara-II. The State Governments would identify districts where chances of success of Swajaldhara are high and prepare proposals for implementation of Swajaldhara II. Such requests should have project proposal along with Project Implementation Plan (PIP) and Detailed Project Report (DPR).

## **ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**

For the proper and effective implementation of Swajaldhara Projects the following enabling environment is essential:

- (i) Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are to be vested with functions and finances, and supported with functionaries to carry out the responsibilities of drinking water supply scheme planning, designing, implementation, operation, maintenance and management.
- (ii) Village Water and Sanitation Committee will have to be a committee of Gram Panchayat.
- (iii) States would need to enact and implement law on effective ground water extraction control, regulation and recharge.
- (iv) Institutional strengthening and capacity development of the State, District, Block, Gram Panchayats and the community level institutions is necessary. State Government should have an effective State Water and Sanitation Mission with a competent support organisation for implementation of Swajaldhara.
- (v) State Government should integrate water conservation and rain water harvesting schemes with the drinking water supply schemes.
- (vi) Rural drinking water, sanitation, health, and hygiene programmes need to be integrated at the State, District, Block and GP levels.

### **Community Participation**

The minimum share of community contribution for 40 litres per capita per day (lpcd) service level will be 10 percent of the estimated capital cost of the project and funding by Government of India would be restricted to 90% of the capital cost.

In case of all habitations fully covered in the States, with 40 lpcd drinking water facility, the service level can be improved to 55 lpcd with 20 per cent of the capital cost to be borne by the community. In such States, in case of water supply schemes providing more than 55 lpcd, the additional incremental cost would have to be borne by the community/ Panchayati Raj Institutions/ State Government. Funding by Government of India would be restricted to 80 per cent of the capital cost of 55 lpcd schemes only. The community contribution towards the capital cost of schemes could be in the form of cash / kind/ labour / land or combination of these. However, at least 50% of the community contribution will have to be in cash. In case community contribution is more than 10% of the scheme cost, the excess amount shall be taken into operation and maintenance fund

## **INSTITUTIONAL SETUP**

### **At State Level**

The State Government would be the coordinating agency for the programme. Panchayati Raj Institutions is the Implementing Agencies. It is necessary to have a State Water and Sanitation Mission (SWSM) under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary/ Officer of Chief Secretary rank. The SWSM may be a registered society. The State Governments would provide necessary operational flexibility to the SWSM for integrated implementation of Swajaldhara.

**At the District level** the District Panchayat / Zila Parishad shall perform all the functions hitherto performed by the DWSC. At the village level Gram Panchayat / VWSC will be the Implementing Agency.

➤ **State level**

The State Water and Sanitation Mission (SWSM) would have the following functions:

- a) Provide policy guidance on Swajaldhara Projects;
- b) Periodic review of implementation of the MOU signed with the Department of Drinking Water Supply;
- c) Consideration and approval of all schemes pertaining to water supply and sanitation sector programmes funded wholly or partially by the Government of India or the External Funding Agencies (including ARWSP, Sub-Mission, TSC);
- d) Convergence of water supply and sanitation activities including Special Projects;
- e) Coordination with various State Government Departments and other partners in relevant activities;
- f) Monitoring and evaluation of physical and financial performance and management of the water supply and sanitation projects;
- g) Arranging independent certification of the quality of construction of Swajaldhara projects;
- h) Integrating and operating communication and capacity development programmes for both water supply and sanitation.
- i) The State Water and Sanitation Mission (SWSM) would have (i) Apex Committee and (ii) Executive Committee.

➤ **The Apex Committee** would be headed by the Chief Secretary/ Officer of Chief Secretary rank with Secretaries in-charge of Rural Drinking Water Supply, Rural Development (RD), Panchayati Raj (PR), Education, Health, Finance, Planning, Information and Public Relations and a Government of India representative as members. In addition, three experts in the field of rural water supply and sanitation could also be made members of the Apex Committee. Secretary of the Department concerned with rural water supply and sanitation shall be the Member Secretary of the Apex Committee. This Committee shall meet at least once in every quarter and not less than 4 times in a year.

➤ **An Executive Committee** with about 15 members shall be constituted to aid and advise the Apex Committee and shall be headed by the Secretary of the Department concerned with Rural Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation, and, an officer not below the rank of a Joint Secretary of the same Department shall be its Member Secretary. Chief Engineer in charge of Rural Drinking Water Supply, officers from the Departments of Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Health, Education, Social Welfare, Planning, Finance and Information and Public Relations shall be ex-officio members. Experts, not exceeding six, in the field of drinking water; communication and rural development; community health and hygiene; community mobilization; Media; and NGOs may be co-opted as members.

## **District level**

- At the District level, the District Panchayat/ Zilla Parishad shall perform all the functions which hitherto were being performed by the District Water and Sanitation Mission (DWSM). However, in States where elected District Panchayats are not in place, the DWSM as a society under the chairmanship of the District Collector could perform the functions. The District Water and Sanitation Committee (DWSC) will be a Committee of the District Panchayat/DWSM.
- The Drawing and Disbursing Officer (DDO) of the District Panchayat / DWSM shall also act as the DDO for all funds received under Swajaldhara.
- The District Panchayat / DWSM shall meet as often as possible but not less than four times a year. It will consider and take note of all schemes under Swajaldhara which have been technically scrutinised and approved by the DWSC. It would review the implementation, progress of Swajaldhara and the Total Sanitation Campaign (where it has been launched) in the district.
- The District Water and Sanitation Committee (DWSC) will be headed by the CEO of the District Panchayat where District Panchayat is performing functions of DWSM. In other cases, DWSC will be headed by the District Collector / District Magistrate. DWSC will have District level officers such as the Executive Engineers of Drinking Water, and District Panchayat; District Education Officer, District Health Officer, Project Director DRDA, District Panchayati Raj Officer, District Social Welfare Officer, and District Information & Public Relations Officer. In addition 3 members who shall be experts and/ from reputed NGOs, may be co-opted into the Committee as members with the prior approval of the SWSM.
- The functions of the District Water & Sanitation Committee (DWSC) are as follows:
  - a) Formulation, management and monitoring of Swajaldhara projects;
  - b) Scrutiny and approval of the schemes submitted by the Block Panchayat/ Gram Panchayat,
  - c) Selection of agencies and/ ngos and enter into agreements for social mobilisation, capacity development, communication, project management and supervision,
  - d) Sensitizing the public representatives, officials and the general public about the Swajaldhara principles;
  - e) Engaging Institutions for imparting training for capacity development of all stakeholders, and Undertaking communication campaign; and
  - f) Interaction with SWSM, State Government and the Government of India.
- The DWSC will utilise the official premises, equipments, vehicles, telephone etc. of the Zilla Parishad / line Department for the official activities. Recurring costs like propulsion charges of vehicles, transport hiring charges, telephone bills etc. can be met from the project fund. No separate vehicle shall be purchased under the project. If absolutely necessary, vehicles may be hired as and when needed for the project purpose.
- The Core Group may be positioned to assist the District Water & Sanitation Committee in implementing the project activities. The Core Group will have professionals in the field of

community development, drinking water supply, engineering, rural management, sociology/ social sciences, communication, human resource development, etc. The Core Group will meet at least once a month and review the progress made under Swajaldhara. It would give its inputs on communication and development strategy, technology options, sustainable exploitation of drinking water resources, community health, and financial viability of schemes etc. to the DWSC. In order to make the Core Group fully functional and effective, State Governments and District Panchayats may have to be supported both financially and technically, by the Government of India from within the project fund.

### **Gram Panchayat (GP) / Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC)**

VWSC under the Gram Panchayat will implement Swajaldhara schemes in the Gram Panchayat. Each Gram Panchayat taking up Swajaldhara schemes shall have a Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) under the chairmanship of the Gram Panchayat Pradhan / President / a Panchayat Member elected by the members of the VWSC for implementation of drinking water supply schemes of their own choice with active participation of the villagers.

- In case the scheme covers more than one Gram Panchayat, a Joint Committee may be constituted at the Intermediate Panchayat level by involving concerned Gram Panchayat representatives and the Intermediate Panchayat Chairman.
- The composition of the VWSCs and Joint Committees can be decided by the State Government under the Panchayat Act. However, women, SC, ST and poorer sections, subject matter specialists, NGOs, CBOs should be given due representation and at least one third members of the VWSC shall be women.

### **VWSC will be responsible for**

- Ensuring gram panchayats to take up Swajaldhara implementation in each Gram Sabha meeting;
- Ensuring community participation and decision making in all phases of scheme activities;
- Organizing community contributions towards capital costs, both in cash and kind.
- Opening and managing bank account for depositing community cash contributions, O&M funds and management of project funds;
- Signing of various agreements with the DWSC;
- Planning, designing, and implementing all drinking water and sanitation activities;
- Procuring construction materials/goods and selection of contractors (where necessary) and supervision of construction activities;
- Commissioning and takeover of completed water supply and sanitation works through a joint inspection with DWSC;
- collection of funds through a tariff, charges and deposit system for O&M of water supply and sanitation works for proper managing and financing of O&M of the services on a sustainable basis; and empowering of women for day to day operation and repairs of the scheme;



- creating and promoting integration of drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in the Panchayat;

### **Process for Implementation**

The following processes, must be observed for effective implementation of the Scheme:-

- a. The Gram Panchayat shall convene a Gram Sabha Meeting, where the Water Supply Scheme of people's choice including design, cost etc., must be finalized.
- b. A resolution must be passed in the Gram Panchayat meeting calling for users/beneficiaries to contribute 10% of the capital expenditure. The Gram Panchayat shall maintain the record of the Community contribution and issue necessary receipts to the contributor/user. The Gram Panchayat must also agree undertake the Operation & Maintenance (O&M) responsibility after the scheme is completed and taken over by them. The Executing Agency for the scheme should also be decided in the Gram Panchayat meeting i.e. whether the Panchayat wants to execute the scheme on its own or wants a State Government Agency to undertake the execution.
- c. The Panchayat must also decide on the user charges to be collected from the community so that adequate funds are available with the Panchayat to undertake O&M.
- d. The users' contribution of 10% must be obtained from the maximum users/beneficiaries of the Scheme. At least 30% of the users/beneficiaries of the Scheme must contribute for the Scheme to be considered for sanction by the Department. Those Schemes will be sanctioned on priority, where the percentage of contributors is more.
- e. In case of a Beneficiary Group (BG), all members of the BG shall meet, consider the proposal including design and costs and pass resolutions before submission of the proposal to the Gram Panchayat.

### **Elements of Swajaldhara**

This will have the following elements:

- a) demand-driven and community participation approach;
- b) Panchayats / communities to plan, implement, operate, maintain and manage all drinking water schemes;
- c) partial capital cost sharing by the communities upfront in cash;
- d) full ownership of drinking water assets with Gram Panchayats; and
- e) full Operation and Maintenance (O&M) by the users/ Panchayats.

### **Norms for Safe Drinking Water**

The following norms are being adopted for providing safe drinking water to rural population in the habitations:

- a. **40 litres** of safe drinking water per capita per day (lpcd) for human beings.
- b. **30 lpcd** additional for cattle in the Desert Development Programme Areas.

- c. One hand-pump or stand post for every 250 persons.
- d. The water source should exist within the habitation or within 1.6 km in the plains and within 100 mtrs elevation in the hilly areas.

The norms may, however, be relaxed to provide for 55 ltrs per capita per day with a source within 0.5 km in the plains and 50 metres elevation in the hills after the coverage of all NC/PC rural habitations in that State is achieved, as per the existing norms of 40 litres per capita per day. This relaxation is subject to the condition that beneficiaries of the relaxed norms share a part of the capital cost (which should not be less than 10%) and shoulder full responsibilities for subsequent Operation and Maintenance.

*\*The following details of Swajaldhara is taken from the Website, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.*

### Utilization of Water- Requirement and Return Flow

S. No.	Particulars	1997-98	2010		2025		2050	
			Low Demand	High Demand	Low Demand	High Demand	Low Demand	High Demand
1.	Utilisable water							
a.	Utilisable surface water	696	696	696	696	696	696	696
b.	Utilisable ground water	390	390	390	390	390	390	390
c.	Existing augmentation from canal irrigation	90	90	90	90	90	90	90
	<b>TOTAL (a+b)</b>	<b>1086</b>	<b>1086</b>	<b>1086</b>	<b>1086</b>	<b>1086</b>	<b>1086</b>	<b>1086</b>
2.	Total water requirement							
a.	Surface water	399	447	458	497	545	641	752
b.	Ground water	230	247	252	287	298	332	428
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>843</b>	<b>973</b>	<b>1180</b>
3.	Return flow							
a.	Surface water	43	52	52	70	74	91	104
b.	Ground water	143	144	148	127	141	122	155
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>259</b>

### Water requirements for different users

S. No.	Particulars	1997-98	2010			2025			2050		
			Low	High	%	Low	High	%	Low	High	%
	<b>Surface water</b>										
1.	Irrigation	318	330	339	48	325	366	43	375	463	39
2.	Domestic	17	23	24	3	30	36	5	48	65	6
3.	Industries	21	26	26	4	47	47	6	57	57	5
4.	Power	7	14	15	2	25	25	3	50	50	5
5.	Inland Navigation		7	7	1	10	10	1	15	15	1
6.	Flood control		-	-		0	-	0	-		0
7.	Afforestation		-	-		0	-	0	-		0
8.	Ecology		5	5	1	10	10	1	20	20	2
9.	Evaporation losses	36	42	42	6	50	50	6	76	76	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>458</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>497</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>752</b>	<b>64</b>
	<b>Ground water</b>										
1.	Irrigation	206	213	218	31	236	245	29	253	344	29
2.	Domestic municipal	13	19	19	2	25	26	3	42	46	4
3.	Industries	9	11	11	1	20	20	2	24	24	2
4.	Power	2	4	4	1	6	7	1	13	14	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>36</b>
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>843</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>973</b>	<b>1180</b>	<b>100</b>
	<b>Total water use</b>										
1.	Irrigation	524	543	557	78	561	611	72	628	817	68
2.	Domestic	30	42	43	6	55	62	7	90	111	9
3.	Industries	30	37	37	5	67	67	8	81	81	7
4.	Power	9	18	19	3	31	33	4	63	70	6
5.	Inland navigation	0	7	7	1	10	10	1	15	15	1
6.	Flood control	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7.	Afforestation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
8.	Ecology	0	5	5	1	10	10	1	20	20	2
9.	Evaporation losses	36	42	42	6	50	50	6	76	76	7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>843</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>973</b>	<b>1180</b>	<b>100</b>

## **Implementation Realities in Uttar Pradesh**

Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state in India. As per the population census of 2001, it accounts for 16 per cent of India's 102,702 crore population. Approximately 79 per cent of the population still lives in rural areas (GoI 2007). The rate of urbanisation, which is considered an indicator of development, has been slow in the state (Jha 2007) The Swajaldhara programme took place in Bareilly district in the Western region of the state. It was proposed in five villages but was only operational in two, Bhartaul and Chaneta, both located on the urban fringe. The programme was approved in 2004/05 and became operational in 2007. It was envisaged that the community should actively participate in the planning phase as well as the implementation of the programme.

**The local NGOs**-support organizations (SOs) in this case-were chosen to facilitate community mobilizations and training-

- Very few villagers and members of the committee were aware that a support organisation was involved in the process of establishing the scheme in their village.
- Local patronage ties were effectively used in mobilizing the rural population. The operators remarked that a number of meetings were held. However, not many villagers could remember an open meeting when the scheme was introduced. Many of them were doubtful that a meeting had taken place, and some of the villagers said that the meeting was held behind closed doors and no consultation was taken.
- The nature of information that was transferred to the villagers varied greatly. Most of them were aware that they had to contribute an amount of money to get a connection; however the process was determined not by them but by the key members in the sociopolitical set-up of the village.
- The **Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC)** is the committee of the *Panchayat* that supervises the programme in the village. Some villagers were not even aware that such a committee existed, and the members themselves didn't know that they were members of it.
- The Gram Pradhans of the villages, who were given the dominance, to handle the operations of the committee conducted no meetings and any discussions held in the villages seemed to assume the decisions made by the Pradhan.
- The local practices and perceptions shaped the working of the VWSC and also the process through which Swajaldhara made its entry into the villages. In a context where participation was less understood as an inclusionary practice and more of a ceremonial exercise, it challenged the bottom-up notion of Swajaldhara from the start.
- The predominant role of the *Gram Pradhan* blocked the functioning of the VWSC, and no. of villagers seemed dissatisfied with its lack of functioning.

### ***Community ownership***

The decentralized bottom-up approach of Swajaldhara was strongly rooted in the idea of community. The policy visualized that once the villagers could relate to the water infrastructure

as their own, they would be able to sustain and manage it. This idea arose as a strong counter to the top-down planning and implementation model. One of the serious lacunas that plagued the earlier policy models was that the users were treated more as subjects than participants in the process.

### **Ownership of water tanks**

Due to information asymmetry at all levels, many villagers did not treat the tank as their own.

- The incentive for taking up the scheme was guided by economic reasons, as they were to pay less for the water connection than they usually had to pay under normal circumstances. This reduction of payment was the central point of mobilizations among the villagers.
- The idea of a demand-driven scheme met with a paradox, as maximum *Gram Pradhans* regarding the inception of the scheme, opined that **‘it is just a routine work of the administration.’** There were fewer connections and water quality was a concern, villagers blamed the government for the decaying state of the infrastructure.
- The roots of the top-down model went deep enough to be countered by a singular idea of a demand-driven scheme of community ownership where the community was not even aware that they were the ones who had to maintain it.
- Used to the top-down approach of service delivery, which Swajaldhara attempted to change, many villagers thought that the tank belonged to the government and were not comfortable with the idea of paying for it. Thus less than 50 per cent of the money was collected. This led to a maintenance deficit in the villages.
- Elusive rules and the pretentious community of users had led to the emergence of a parallel group of free beneficiaries of the scheme but were not prepared to pay for water. The dominance of these free beneficiaries discouraged others from paying for their water.
- Numbers of people belonged to the labour class and are below the poverty line and cannot pay. Despite quality concerns, poorer households could not afford to pay and used the poor quality water.
- The water supply also suffered from infrastructural problems, especially the irregular supply of water due to recurring faults. This again discouraged willingness to pay.
- Some people who already had connections were no longer willing to pay the rents in the absence of a water supply and instead used the ‘yellow water’. This adversely affected the agenda of increasing connections, as most of the people perceived it as a failed investment.

### **Participation of Women**

Women were identified as the key beneficiaries of the programme (GoI 2003). Policy documents gave due recognition to this fact and underlined the need for active participation of women in the working of the committee. This was seemingly impractical in the rural context of Uttar Pradesh.

- The policy implementers were not enthusiastic about the empowerment agenda due to the, patriarchal context of the society.

- Within Swajaldhara, the mobilizations and participation of women was not visible in villages.
- Women were definitely the target users of the scheme but the patriarchal approach of these villages prevented their full mobilization.
- Women managed to enter the progression of Swajaldhara in the mobilization phase but they were relegated to the private realm of the household once the tank was put in place.
- Their presence was programmed in the phase of mobilization but their participation in decision-making was absent.

### **Role and accountability of the support organisations (SOs)**

The role of the SOs was to prepare and train the community to maintain the scheme. These organisations were engaged to give a participatory framework to the project. They were the channel of communication between the bureaucracy, i.e. the District Water and Sanitation Committee, the SWSM and the villagers. The SOs, given their proximity to the local context were delegated the responsibility for selecting the villages. But the reality was far different.

- The selection of villages was based on the ability to generate demand for new water schemes among the villagers. But, the generation of demand rested on people's ability to agree to pay for the scheme. Thus, most of the proposed villages were in close proximity to the city.
- The usual complaint was that SO personnel did not consult the people during their work and if the villagers raised any questions, they would be disregarded as being ignorant and uneducated.
- The local bureaucracy and the SOs, had a superiority and prejudiced attitude reflecting their belief that villagers would not have the technical knowhow to maintain a tank.
- it is interesting to note that the SOs were perceived to be a link between the villagers and the bureaucracy but they were treated as the voice of the people whereas the villagers saw the SOs as an imposition from above.

### **CONCLUSION**

During past decades, the government had implemented policies for drinking water supply that reflected an understanding that it was the duty of Govt. to realize the human right to water for all rural residents of the country. But, Swajaldhara reforms are in a contrast to this and are in direct opposition to the principles that guided governmental action for the previous several decades. Swajaldhara principles conceive water as an economic good, and contemplate imposing on each individual community an increasingly important burden of their own water supply, and generally, conceive of a reduced role for the government and a simultaneous increase of the role of the private sector in delivering drinking water. The implementation of these new policies will lead to outcomes that are unacceptable from the point of view of established measures of equity and will directly or indirectly lead to violations of the human right to water. While the demand-led paradigm benefits a segment of the rural population, it affects the poorest by bypassing them, it creates increased inequalities in access to water, and in the long run, the imposition of operation

and maintenance costs to each village individually will lead to reduced access to water in villages less well-endowed with water.

Swajaldhara strongly underlined community management beyond participation and stressed the need to develop linkages between national plans and community needs. The idea of community, which was strongly engrained in the policy discourse and was the foundation of the programme, was not resilient by the time it reached the village. The community was still a group of beneficiaries who had to be supplied with water, rather than agents who could participate in the operation and maintenance of the scheme. Marginalized at the inception of the scheme, i.e. in the planning phase, the village community/user group was more in the status of subject beneficiaries than citizen participants.

However, the need to protect groundwater for drinking purposes conflicts directly with the government's food security objectives and subsidies to the agricultural sector, which have encouraged the rapid and unregulated development of groundwater for irrigation. As a result, there has been over-extraction of groundwater along with the depletion and contamination of groundwater sources.

It is also noteworthy here that there are large occurrences of Tripping from 'fully covered' to 'partially/not covered' categories due to a number of factors such as: sources going dry, lowering of the groundwater table, outliving systems, and Population growth resulting in a decrease in per capita availability. Moreover, the village drinking water projects are not in the best shape, although most villages have been connected to drinking water. The reason is that the central government resources are available for the construction of rural drinking water services, but it is up to the states to operate and maintain them with constant proportion of budgetary allocation during these years.

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