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Community Initiative In Rural Water Supply: The Success Story Of Jorhat Sub Division Of Assam

Dr. Susmita Priyadarshini

Assistant Professor In Economics, D.C.B. Girls' College, Jorhat, Assam, India

Abstract:

Community Initiative in rural water supply is encouraged by the Government of India in 2006 under National Rural Drinking Water Quality Monitoring and Surveillance Programme .But the community initiative in supplying water in rural area was encouraged much earlier in 1993 by Public Health Engineering Department in Jorhat sub division of Assam. With an unique model developed by an engineer, A.B. Paul, Bangal Pukhuri water users' committee started supplying piped water to households. The model shows a paradigm shift from project mode to performance mode. Now the sub division has 177 active water users' committees providing water supply to thousands of households. This is done without the involvement of Panchayats. Government policies can be successful if the communities and beneficiaries take the responsibility of implementing and making it a success. Jorhat sub division exemplifies it by managing the supply and monitoring the water quality efficiently.

Key words: Community Initiative, Water Users' Committee, Panchayat.

1.Introduction

After food security it is the time to think seriously about water security for India. The Government of India has tried since 1949 through various policies to ensure water security. But in India still over one million people die of waterborne diseases annually. It is mainly the rural people who do not get safe drinking water. Access to safe and clean drinking water in sufficient quantity is still a challenge for some people. Recognising this National Rural Drinking Water Programme encourages the state governments to devolve management of rural water supply schemes to PRIs. So some states have transferred the full range of functions to GPs, others have transferred only a few functions. As our Panchayats are overburdened with several government policies and there is an absence of substantial devolution, Panchayats are not very successful in ensuring water security. Contrary to this Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) of the Government of Assam is running a unique model for ensuring water security to the rural people since 1991 through the direct participation of the community or users. The model which indicates a clear deviation from an earlier supply driven approach was the brainchild of an engineer of the same department, Mr. A. B. Paul. He started the Bangal Pukhuri Water Supply Scheme in Jorhat subdivision of Assam in 1993 to supply piped water to the households, which was managed by water users' committee. The water supplied was from the deep tube well. Realising the importance of demand driven approach, the department has been implementing it in the state since 1995 .

The uniqueness of this scheme lies in-

- It is a learning by doing approach where the modalities are changed on the basis of field level experience.
- It is run without the involvement of PRIs.
- Though the Government of India stressed on the need of community initiative long back in 1991, yet clear direction regarding community initiative came only in 2006 under National Rural Drinking Water Quality Monitoring and Surveillance Programme. But the approach was made with Assam much earlier in 1993.
- It indicates a paradigm shift from project mode to performance mode in the field of water supply.

The approach entrusts the responsibility of supplying water and maintaining quality at the hands of water users' committee. At first the villagers of a particular village approach the PHED department and after the project gets sanctioned, in the presence of PHED officials a users' committee is formed where the PHED informed them all the modalities of maintenance and management. Families taking water connection become the members of the committee. Of course, India is not the introducer of this community initiative. In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, the Community Water Initiative (CWI) was launched by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2003 to improve communities access to clean water, sanitation services as well as contribute to women's welfare, children education and fight against waterborne diseases. Water supply and sanitation are two critical areas in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Community initiative is being successfully utilised in Haiti also. There are several water committees called CAEPAs (Comites d'Aprovisionnement en Eau Potable et d'Assainissement), in charge of water systems in rural areas and some small towns. They consist of elected community members. Their degree of formalisation and effectiveness are of course, not the same. The best water committees meet regularly, closely interact with the

community, collect revenues, hire a plumber, perform routine repairs, have a bank account. They are registered and approved by the National Directorate for Water Supply and Sanitation in the Ministry of Public Works called DINEPA in Haiti.

2.The Objective Of The Study

In this paper an attempt has been made to assess the community initiative in Jorhat Subdivision.

3.Methodology

It is an analytical study based on both the primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected from the users' committees and secondary data are collected from web sites and books.

4.Analysis

There are total 177 no. of active water users' committees in Jorhat subdivision. Total 115 no. of committees were set up during last three years. It means that about 65 % of active committees was established in 2010-2013. These users' committees are registered in the name of Piped Water Supply Scheme, e.g., Sahpuria Piped Water Supply Scheme (Sahpuria PWSS). Till 31st March 2013, 40 litres of water were supplied per capita per day. Since 1st April 2013, 55 litres of water have been supplied per capita per day. Monthly tariff collected per family varies from Rs.50 to Rs. 200. Depending on the cost of operation, each committee decides whether they will charge Rs.50, Rs. 100 or Rs.200 per family. Cost of operation and water quality maintenance is incurred from this collected revenue. Water tariff is collected by the committee, everything for water quality maintenance from water testing to pouring bleaching powder is done by the committee. PHED department has their own laboratories with trained staff to test water quality. Various registers are maintained by the committees—attendance register, visitor's register, energy register, chemical register, beneficiary register, material register, complaint register etc. Accounts are verified by a registered C.A. Over and above, the sole responsibility of supplying safe drinking water to the rural households is taken by the users' committee. PHED transfers the responsibility of supplying water and maintaining the quality to the beneficiaries. At the influence of the President of the Users' Committee, customers try to pay water tariff regularly. Each committee functions for two years holding meeting at least three times in a year.

SI No.	Name of PWSS	No.s of House Connections	No.s of Street Taps	Monthly tariff collected per Household	Total tenure of the present Users' Committee
1	Bamun Gaon No. 2 PWSS	160	03	Rs.50	04 months
2	Charigaon Zone-II PWSS	260	02	Rs.80	5 years
3	Lahdoigarh PWSS	296	-	Rs.100	2 years
4	Balichapori PWSS	170	1	Rs.100	7 months
5	Pulibor Bamun Gaon PWSS	300	4	Rs.100	9 years
6	Bhatemara Porbatia PWSS	265	0	Rs.80	2 months

SI No.	Name of PWSS	No.s of House Connections	No.s of Street Taps	Monthly tariff collected per Household	Total tenure of the present Users' Committee
7	Sahpuria PWSS	172	0	Rs.100	2 years
8	Toklai Chah Bagisha PWSS	145	2	Rs.100	1 month
9	Raidung Komar	93	8	Rs. 70	2 years
10	Chinamora Sadar Rup Nagar PWSS	290	-	Rs.70	3 years
11	Itakhuli Kumar Koivortta PWSS	216	-	Rs.70	2 years
12	Sankarpur Napam Karpungpuli PWSS	280	-	Rs.70	3 months
13	Mission Compound	168	-	Rs.100	6 months

SI No.	Name of PWSS	No.s of House Connections	No.s of Street Taps	Monthly tariff collected per Household	Total tenure of the present Users' Committee
14	Bongal Pukhuri PWSS		13	Rs.100	20 years
15	Lichubari PWSS	120	-	Rs.100	2 years
16	Chutiakari PWSS	162	-	Rs.100	1.5 years
17	Uttar Dakhin Hatichungi	98	-	Rs.100	1.5 years
18	Kakoty Gaon PWSS	251 year	-	Rs.200	1
19	Moran Gaon PWSS	116	-	Rs.100	1.5 years
20	Teok PWSS	398	-	Rs.100	6 months
21	Miri Gaon PWSS	138	-	Rs.100	6 years
22	Majkluri PWSS	100	-	Rs.50	4 years
23	Kati Kuchia PWSS	95	-	Rs.100	4 ½ yearts
24	Teok Bongali Gaon PWSS	124	-	Rs.100	3 years
25	Maharagaon PWSS	62	-	Rs.100	1.5 years
26	Nowboisa Gaon PWSS	53	-	Rs.100	6 months
27	Dewan Bharalua PWSS	120	-	Rs.100	1 year
28	Bali Gaon NO.2 PWSS	180	05	RS.75	2 years
29	Ajan Chalikhowa PWSS	109	Years	RS.50	3 years
30	Laimekuri PWSS	73	-	Rs.50	1 year
31	Sensua PWSS	489	10	Rs.50	5 years
32	Bijoy Nagar	112	06	Rs.100	5 years

Table 1: Some Successful Users' Committees Identified By The Department
Source: PHED, Jorhat Sub Division

SI No.	Monthly Tariff	No. of PWSS
1	Upto Rs.50	73
2	Rs.51-Rs.80	16
3	Rs.100	73
4	Rs.200	01
5	Have not collected tariff	14

Table 2: Monthly Tariff Collection
Source: Primary Data Collected By The Author

SI No.	Range	No.s of PWSS
1	1-50	72
2	51-100	50
3	101-150	31
4	151-200	10
5	201-250	04
6	251-300	07
7	Above 300	03
8	Total	177

*Table 3: House Connection Wise No.s of PWSS
Source: Primary Data collected by the author*

5. Case Study : Pulibor Bamun Gaon Pani Jogan Achani

Pulibor Bamun Gaon Pani Jogan Achani was established in 2004. This users' committee started functioning since 2005. Though in 2005 only 70 families sought household connection now they have 300 member families with household connection. There are four street connection or taps in the village. Water is supplied to households through three separate lines. Operation and management are totally under the control of the committee. Though pump operator (employee of PHED) is generally seen in almost every committee they do not feel the need of that. Not depending on the PHED department for supply they themselves purchase all the inputs for water quality maintenance. With audited account and electricity bill clearance the committee is successful in fulfilling the financial norms. Setting the best example of self learning the committee improved upon their own management and became able to get the award for best water supply management. The award is called Uttam Gram Pani Jogan Parichalana Puraskar which was instituted in 2009 by the Government of Assam. This award is also unique to this state.

6. Findings

- Through this initiative, total 15, 277 households have got piped water house connection.
- The highest no. of house connection is found in Sansua water users' committee where total 489 households have already taken connection. At the rate of Rs.50 per household its revenue collection is Rs. 24, 450 per month.
- The 100% household connection is achieved by Pulibor Bamun Gaon Pani Jogan Achani where all the 300 families have house connection.
- Tocklai Chah Bagicha water users' committee became successful to give connection to 145 no. of households within a month of its establishment.
- Bongal Pukhuri PWSS has already passed 20 successful years.
- Users' committee of Pulibor Bamun Gaon , Bongal Pukhuri and Charigaon Zone-II have already been awarded Uttam Gram Pani Jogan Parichalana Puraskar by the Government of Assam.
- Besides house connection , some committees maintain street taps depending on demand. Total 103 no. of committees provide both the household and street connection. There are total 1008 no.s of street taps.
- Some committees are becoming so expert in their activities that they do not feel the need of taking help from the department every time except seeking permission for withdrawing money from the committee's account. One of the members of the committee take the responsibility of operating the pump, one takes the responsibility of collecting tariff, one takes the responsibility of purchasing bleaching powder, lime , sand etc. for maintaining water quality. People themselves learn the A to Z of management with the passage of time. Besides Pulibor Bamun Gaon Pani Jogan Achani , there are 19 other committees which are functioning well without taking the help of any employee of PHED for operating pumps.
- No. of water users' committee which have engaged local persons for the operation of the scheme and paid by them is 107
- In most of the cases, land required for the water supply plant is donated by one of the persons of the village.
- Though the tenure of a water users' committee is two years only, yet on public demand most of the committees function for more than two years.

7. Problems Faced By The Committee

- The main problem faced by these committees is frequent power cuts. Of course , this is so common in Assam that people are now giving up thinking it as a problem. But what is important is that they have to pay electricity tariff at a commercial rate. It is free in Gujrat and subsidised in Bihar. At least electricity supply at subsidised rate will lessen their running cost.
- Again the Government of Assam is running several flagship development programmes with or without community initiatives. These are operated by different departments with different rules which in fact overwhelm village community. So, the creation of a new job of Gram Mitra who will be an expert in all policies will accelerate the pace of implementation.
- For withdrawing money from the Users' committee's account, concerned Executive Engineer's signature is required. But he always remains so busy that for a signature sometimes a committee has to wait for two- three months. But these person who is more involved with the committee is one of the Assistant Engineers of the concerned sub division. So instead of Executive engineer if he is given the permission to sign, then it will save time of the committees.

8. Conclusion

Community initiatives are encouraged in almost all the Government schemes in one form or the other. In the proposed National Water Framework Law Bill also community initiative has been given importance. But what is going on in water supply sector of Assam is without the direct involvement of PRIs. As Panchayats are too much occupied with the government policies and this model of PHED is working well without the participation of Panchayats, this approach can be promoted as an unique model by the government. After all, ensuring water security is not like T-20 or one day cricket match. Government policies will be 100% successful only if the community or beneficiaries take the responsibility of implementing and making it a success. Experience of Jorhat subdivision says so. At the same time women should be encouraged to take the charge of the committee as a President or Secretary. Women are always good managers, experience shows that if they are given the chance then they can completely change

a negative environment into a positive one. Moran Gaon, Mahara Gaon and Sankarpur Karpungpuli Users' committees are functioning well under the guidance of lady president.

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