

Money is not the problem, but systems are... Mr P. Vishwarup, Honourable Minister for Rural Water & Sanitation, Government of Andhra Pradesh

Mr P. Vishwarup was reflecting on the priorities of Andhra Pradesh in WASH sector. He was keenly observing the practices, processes, policies and strategies adopted by Water & Sanitation Management Organization (WASMO) of Government of Gujarat. He shared his thoughts and future plans for the state of Andhra Pradesh with **MV Rama Chandrudu, WASSAN** (Documentation and Communication Officer, WASHCost India Team) during the exposure visit to Gujarat between 2nd and 5th Dec 2009. A team of senior government offices from GoAP including Mr P.Vishwarup, Honorable Minister for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation; Ms Chitra Ramachandran

Delegates from Andhra Pradesh Shri P.Vishwarup, Honourable Minister for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation; Ms Chitra Ramachandran IAS, Secretary; RWS, Mr B.Rajeshwara Rao, ENC, Dr M.Snehalatha, Country Coordinator WASHCost India meeting Shri Narendra Modi, Honourable Chief Minister of Gujarat on 3rd Dec 2009 at Gandhinagar, Gujarat.



IAS, Secretary, RWSS Mr B.Rajeshwara Rao, Engineering Chief and other senior officers from the department Mr M.Narasinga Rao, Mr G.Veera Pratap; Mr U.Venkata Ramaiah and Ms G.Kavita visited WASMO, Gujarat and several village in rural Gujarat, India to learn various aspects of providing sustainable drinking water services to its rural areas. Dr Snehalatha, Country Coordinator WASHCost (India); Dr Rama Mohan Rao, Consultant (WASHCost India Project) and MV Rama Chandrudu WASSAN joined this team. WASHCost India organized this exposure visit as part its embedding strategy.

The main excerpts of the interview are here.

What are the current priorities of Government of Andhra Pradesh in WASH sector?

100% coverage of habitations of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is the top priority of the Government. Government is also committed to quench the thirst of drought prone districts like Anantapur. Several on-going projects in the district need to be completed on priority basis. We also have a clear plan to cover villages in Nalgonda and Prakasam districts that are badly affected by fluoride and arsenic. 70% of fluoride affected villages was already covered under protected water schemes. Remaining 30% of villages also need to be covered within 2 years. Government of Andhra Pradesh already allocated 150 Crores of rupees for this purpose.

Is drinking water a priority in current thinking of Government of Andhra Pradesh?

Apparently, Jala Yagnam (a program of Government of Andhra Pradesh for developing irrigation potential in Andhra Pradesh) has dominant focus on irrigation. But once the water is available through Jala Yagnam, the drinking water would be a top priority and would over-ride even irrigation, in situation of scarcity. There is no need to make any special efforts to make drinking water as a priority at this point of time...

Are the current budgets adequate for completing the plans?

The current budget allocations from State Government (in the form of matching grants, etc) to rural water supply from state government are not adequate. It is important for the Government of Andhra Pradesh also to allocate more resources for this purpose. As the minister for drinking water and sanitation, I would strive to impress the Honorable Chief Minister to increase the financial allocations to rural water supply projects. However, there are enough funds from central government and bilateral projects. In a way, money is not the problem.

However, there are problems with the systems that we have. Villagers/ Grama Panchayati have to be dependent on Government for maintenance of systems. Villages do not have even small funds at their disposal. On the other hand, there is a big concern about the actual use of funds allocated to Grama Panchayats for maintenance under 12th Finance Commission. There is a need to improve the fund flow and related systems in the state.

What is most impressive in Gujarat, as far as drinking water supply systems are concerned?

I am impressed with the community participation at village level in Gujarat. Pani Samitis (water committees) are able to effectively manage drinking water systems at village level. They are able to collect water cess and retain the amount with them. They are able to meet most of the maintenance costs from their own contributions and revenue is generated within the village lowering the pressure on the Government to provide O&M costs. With the support of several committed NGOs, WASMO was able to organize stable local institutions – Pani Samitis for management of drinking water systems. Communities are involved planning, executing and maintaining systems. They also contributed in the capital costs. This is possible only when communities are motivated..

I would like to focus on forming village level institutions for drinking water management in Andhra Pradesh. Training, Information, Communication and Education processes (through street plays, pamphlets, slogans, audio visuals, others) need to be substantially improved in Andhra Pradesh. Though the department formed Village Level Water Sanitation Committees already, there is a need to improve their effectiveness, functionality and capacities.

I would like to develop a clear strategy for improving the WASH services through effective participation of local institutions such as Village Water & Sanitation Committees. I would like to organize a workshop

with senior officers of the department, secretaries for designing new strategies for WASH sector in the state. I would like to invite WASHCost team also for discussions on this strategy. After discussing with senior officers of the department, I would like to make a presentation to the Honorable Chief Minister for taking his consent.

What are the contours of this strategy?

Drinking water security is achieved only when local communities are engaged with this agenda. External funding has a limited role. Communities should be willing to contribute to the capital and maintenance costs of water supply systems.

Apart from this, Village Water and Sanitation Committees should be brought into the fold of Grama Panchayati (as a Sub Committee of Grama Panchayati). The funds under 12th Finance Commission should directly reach these VWSC. This helps them to sustain the water facilities and infrastructure.

Local institutions should nurture water supply and management systems, like a father, who nurtures the future of his child. A father cannot afford to leave everything to government and expect the child to develop, even if government provides free education and other support. The responsibility of government is to ensure that the local institutions are involved and capacitated in the process of drinking water governance.

What kind of institutional arrangements do you envisage for operationalizing this strategy?

As already mentioned, at habitation level, Village Water Sanitation Committees need to be revitalized and strengthened. The department is already operating at district/ state level. There is a gap between the department and community. An arrangement such as Water and Sanitation Management Organization (WASMO) in Gujarat is relevant in Andhra Pradesh too. Though there are similar arrangements in Andhra Pradesh, there is a need to revitalize them in the state in order to bridge this gap. By establishing a WASMO type of institution, we could effectively improve the community participation and capacities of local institutions.

I would expect that this intermediary institution would take up several tasks including forging partnerships with capable NGOs and reach out to the village level institutions. I found that committed NGOs played a critical role in strengthening Pani Samitis (Water Committees) in Gujarat. We need to replicate this in Andhra Pradesh too.

In Andhra Pradesh, we generally observe considerable interference of political parties (in a negative way) in the functioning of local institutions. How can this be minimized in case of Village Water Sanitation Committees?

Political parties, their cadres need to be educated that long term sustainability is achieved only with community participation and their contribution. Unnecessary political interference in the functioning of

VWSC is not desirable. It is important to realize that the functioning of VWSC is very tough. In case of scarcity, the VWSC members have to negotiate with departments, water users associations (in case of a water tank, if it is used for drinking water) and others. Apart from this, the VWSC has to collect contributions and water tariffs from villagers. It also has to maintain records transparently. Persons with only political influence cannot perform all these functions. Even if they are nominated initially, they would soon withdraw from these committees, if they cannot perform.