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**KERALA RURAL WATER SUPPLY &
SANITATION PROJECT -
A UNIQUE EXERCISE IN GOVERNMENT
& DONOR COORDINATION**

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KERALA RURAL WATER SUPPLY & SANITATION PROJECT – A UNIQUE EXERCISE IN GOVERNMENT & DONOR COORDINATION

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India's southern state boasts of a long sea-coast, rivers, lagoons, copious monsoon rains, green vegetation, verdant forests but paradoxically, a lack of drinking water. "Water, water everywhere", wrote the 19th century English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "yet not a drop to drink". Much the same dilemma that faced The Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's celebrated poem is Kerala's problem today. It is in order to rectify this incongruous situation that the Indian Government, aided by two bilateral donor agencies - the DGIS, development agency of the Netherlands Government and DANIDA, the development agency of the Danish Government - have successfully launched a program, implemented by the Kerala Water Authority (KWA), to redress the existing situation. The proposals were put forward in 1982 and as recently as in the autumn of 1989 the project was reviewed in order to assess the progress of the Rural Water Scheme and the Pilot Sanitation Project.

Commenting on the review of the project, Bob Boydell, Senior Engineer of the UNDP/World Bank Water and Sanitation Program, and resource person of the review team talks of the Kerala scheme as a "unique project". "It is heartening to see different agencies collaborating towards one goal", says Boydell. "The DGIS, DANIDA and the State Government of Kerala have displayed a high degree of cooperation in pursuance of their aims". The "aims" remain better health for all, in this instance, through safer water supply and sanitation. The UN General Assembly declared the decade of the 1980s as the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation decade. The goal set for governments internationally were to provide their people with clean water and adequate sanitation by 1990. While the basic structure and the methods used to achieve these goals were left to individual governments, the international donor community was directed to support these efforts with financial resources, technical know-how and with better coordination of program.

The Rural Water Supply initiated in Kerala serves over 2 million people. The foreign bilateral aid agencies also provide technical know-how and expert advice. The Dutch are, out of necessity, masters of water management having successfully battled, over many centuries, the turbulent North Sea. Jan Speets, Water Coordinator at the Royal Netherlands Embassy, New Delhi, has been involved with this project for the past six years. Explains Speets : "The situation we have to deal with in Kerala is different from any other and requires a completely innovative approach. There are several important things you have to take into account when implementing a scheme like this one. The chief of these is the involvement of the people, educating them towards better health conditions and assessing with them basics like design and facilities, for example are there standposts and handpumps or taps each for

women and children to use". Speets talks glowingly of the overwhelmingly positive response from the people, especially the women. "Previously these people were never taken seriously. Now they are treated as partners in this project".

Lars Lund, Counsellor (Development) of the DANIDA Mission at the Royal Danish Embassy, New Delhi, considers the Kerala water project as "one of our most exciting projects. It is different from any other socio-economic program with a small but powerful staff strength". With autonomous agencies involved and two different donors has it been easy for all concerned to work together? "Bureaucracy functions the same everywhere, we have tried to streamline it towards one goal and are acting as one rather than separate donors". It does however, admits Lund, require more efforts than envisaged, primarily because individual agreements between governments may not be totally compatible and hence administration may become difficult. But it can be inspiring to learn other ways of doing things. It also teaches us to be flexible. DGIS and DANIDA have cooperated on several issues. "Happily our policy thinking has been similar and there has been no deviation of views of the projects undertaken", says Jan Speets. "The supporting agencies are not working in isolation and it shows". He adds: "ours is not a hit and run approach. This wish to cooperate with all the parties involved helps to optimize the final results".

The implementation of the Rural Water Scheme is handled by the Kerala Water Authority. Socio-Economic Units have been established to work with the Kerala Water Authority to strengthen collaboration, coordination and exchange between all involved, including the people for whom these projects are intended.

Even though it is people in rural areas and lower groups who suffer most from lack of clean drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities, these people are often overlooked by planners and implementors of projects, which attempt to improve living and sanitary conditions. That has been mentioned by Jan Speets of the DGIS. The Rural Water Scheme in Kerala has community participation as one of its strategies. It was realized that unless the local people were, not only made aware of, but involved in their own welfare such projects usually met with a minimum of success. Prior to this, experts in the field did not consider it necessary to either consult or involve the people, whom they considered lay-men and hence incapable of understanding a technical project. The inevitable response to this attitude was to make people hostile and uncooperative, suspicious of any move that, however positive, they believed was being forced on them. As such the collaborators in the Rural Water Scheme initiated through the SEU's a dialogue with the local residents as a basic step to be taken towards launching this innovative project.

In Kerala, which prides itself on being the first state in India to achieve 100% literacy, the population is heterogenous. These two characteristics join together to make the people politically conscious which is why the grass-roots approach works well. The rural community, when approached, were amenable to

suggestions of plans to improve their water supply, sanitation and environmental conditions and were enthusiastic in lending support to such a scheme. The agencies involved placed special emphasis on the involvement of women. "Women play a crucial role in the home and thus in the community", emphasizes Jan Speets. Not only do they collect and distribute water for household use, but they are instrumental in moulding a family's thoughts and ideas. Obvious spin-offs of a rural water scheme would be educational and health activities and sanitation. Educating a community towards better health must, thus, begin with women.

To facilitate a streamlined and efficient implementation of the scheme the KWA has bifurcated Kerala into two major regions. Each region is further divided into district-level workings which include the village panchayat. Seventy-three panchayats are involved in this scheme and six thousand employees are working to implement it. In such a large venture, costs are understandably high. Besides salaries paid to the employees, a great deal of research and technical expertise goes into identifying sources of water. Following this there are the expenses of processing and pumping the water from source to a handy outlet, electricity charges, construction of reservoirs and funds needed for necessary repairs and new construction like wells, residences for employees and officers.

Per capita expenses works out to Rs. 500, or Rs. 1 for every 1000 litres. Each year the Kerala Water Authority spends Rs. 0.50 crores on water supply and sanitation schemes. Government allocation for water supply, loans from financial institutions like the Life Insurance Corporation of India bilateral assistance from the Danish and Dutch governments and water charges from the public are sources of finance. Besides, to cut costs the emphasis is on low-cost technology and encouragement of the participation of local residents in developmental activities through either labour, or in kind.

Implementation of the scheme begins at the grassroots level. Each region is divided into wards with approximately 8,000 to 10,000 people per ward. Ward Water Committees consist of members elected from within the villages, since they are familiar with the area and feel the needs of the residents, their guidance is crucial in the siting of standposts, community taps and the construction and maintenance of latrines. "It is then that KWA and the donors offer technical advice on the pipes, wells, intake, etc.," says Lars Lund. "It is this working together that makes the joint venture both complicated and challenging and at the same time also very satisfying.

Training Manuals for members of Ward Water Committees have been brought out. They clarify not only what the program aims to achieve, but also identify methods of community involvement. The basic goal is to provide drinking water facilities to suit the need of the community by involving the community at all stages of planning and implementation. Previously in such projects, the focus was on technical issues, like design, construction and maintenance, involving only engineers and technicians. During the decade it

has been learnt that community-based water supply systems work better than centrally administered ones. It tends to ensure respect for social and cultural standards of the area, for the success of a program.

The Rural Water Scheme ensures that the people are educated towards awareness of the need for pure water. This understanding on their part is essential to ensure their support for the protection of water sources. Each panchayat is advised on regular chlorination of wells already in existence. For new wells that need to be dug or bored, certain specific guidelines have been laid down to ensure the purity of the water. Implementation of these guidelines is carried out under the supervision of the SEUs. In the construction of new wells a distance of at least 15 metres has been retained between the site selected and public latrines, compost heaps, animal refuse. A protective wall is built round the well and a concrete platform constructed with drainage provision for run-off water. It has been ascertained that ideally a pump should be used to lift well water, but where this is not feasible a single set of ropes towards an awareness of their civic duties has to be part of this program to ensure that the community does not use the area to bathe either themselves or wash clothes and animals near the well.

Wells continue to remain the age-old source of water they always have been. But the lower income groups in a community who do not have access to individual household taps now enjoy the benefits of public standposts and community taps. Public standposts have been fixed in areas with a scarcity of available water. The water runs through a purification process before it reaches the public. "To meet costs", says Lars Lund, "it is essential that a public standpost benefit at least 20 households, that is 200 people". Costs for this are borne by local self-governing bodies which pay from Rs. 1000 to Rs. 1500 for each tap. A panchayat can have as many as 100 taps and foot a bill of Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 1.5 lakh paid to the Kerala Water Authority.

Community taps run on the same principle but service a smaller section of people, 8 to 10 families apply for and pay the sum of Rs. 7.50 per year per household for the water collected from these taps. High and middle income groups now have the facility of private household connections and are required to pay an installation charge of Rs. 2000 besides monthly water charges.

Outside the core water scheme, but connected to it, is the emphasis placed on education of the people in health and environmental sanitation. The seven members elected to the Ward Water Committee are instrumental in ensuring that local residents be made aware of their individual involvement in ensuring safe drinking water and consequently better health. People are instructed to collect water only from the safe sources already identified. Water for household use must be stored properly, protected, and if used for drinking, boiled and cooled before use.

Individual attendants are now positioned at standposts to ensure there is no wastage, no growth of vegetation around the area, to see to drains being cleaned regularly to prevent their clogging and drinking water used specifically for that purpose only. The Ward Water Committee has the additional responsibility of identifying faulty equipment like handpumps and ensuring either their speedy repair or replacement. At all stages in the progress of the project, the SEUs assess the function and achievements of the scheme. Further an Indo-Danish-Dutch Review Mission consisting of Dr. S.K. Biswas, Deputy Adviser, Department of Rural Development, Government of India; DANIDA Technical Advisers Erik Sjorslev Jensen and Kurt Morch Jensen, Dutch Consultant Rebecca Katikaran, a sociologist and Jan Teun Visscher of IRC and adviser to DGIS published their report undertaken after intensive study of the project. Bob Boydell, of the UNDP/World Bank Water and Sanitation Program and Lars Lund and Dilip Fauzdar of DANIDA participated as resource persons.

The Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Projects in Kerala are a unique exercise in donor and government collaboration. The published report and the progress of the scheme determine how organizations working together pooling resources, sharing expertise and information together with the involvement of concerned individuals will ensure the success of such innovative programs which have not lost sight of their original objective : to improve the quality of life and health of the rural population, especially the poor.