

“Poor sanitation in Karnataka villages”

Survey finds high fluoride and nitrate levels in the drinking water

Staff Reporter

BANGALORE: High fluoride and nitrate levels in drinking water, dismal sanitation with rampant open defecation, high incidence of chikungunya, and a higher risk of fungal and other infections in women. These are some of the key findings of ASHWAS, a survey of household water and sanitation in rural Karnataka, conducted by Arghyam, an organisation working in the water sector.

The report, which was released on Monday by Governor H.R. Bhardwaj, is the result of a survey covering 17,200 households in 172 gram panchayats across 28 districts in the State (all districts except Bangalore Urban).

Aimed at collating people's perceptions, taking it back to

the people and also catalysing action, the survey found that 87 per cent of households depended on groundwater.

If reliability, access and quality are the issues of concern to citizens, then the survey presented a mixed picture.

Although 78 per cent reported availability of drinking water throughout the year, a majority of the remainder samples said they procured water from unprotected sources.

Quality

Of the 2,114 samples of water sources tested in the vil-

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lages, 60 per cent were found to have high fluoride levels (more than one ppm — the Bureau of Indian Standards norm on permissible fluoride). While 20 per cent of the sources tested positive for nitrate contamination, 38 per cent had bacteriological contamination.

The survey pointed out that 72 per cent of people still defecated in the open and the figure was as high as 98 per cent in Raichur district. **Hygiene**

“With the survey indicating that 94 per cent of women in rural areas use cloth for

protection, there is a high risk of fungal and other infections among them. Lack of awareness and lack of affordable sanitary towels were the reasons cited for this,” Ms Nandhamuni said.

Reliability of supply

Arghyam chairperson Rohini Nilekani said the survey threw up serious concerns about the reliability of water supply, sustainability of the primary water sources, and on the quality of water accessed by the people. “The survey reaffirms the alarming sanitation and hygiene situation with its inevitable impacts on public health,” she said.

The Governor stressed the need for giving more powers to the gram panchayats to ensure water availability and improving its quality.

ताज से सटे गांवों में नहीं

बजती शहनाई

आगरा (एसएनबी)। विश्व स्तर पर ताजमहल हमारा गौरव है। वहीं ताज के निकट बसे आधा दर्जन गांवों के लिए ताज अभिशाप बना है। ताज की सुरक्षा के लिए इंतजामों के चलते इन गांव में शादी संबंध होना बंद हो गए हैं। नगला पैमा में पिछले नौ वर्ष से शहनाई नहीं बजी है। आलम यह है कि गांव के लोग कैद होने पर मजबूर हैं।

ताजमहल के पास यमुना किनारे नगला पैमा, नगला तल्फी, घड़ी बंगर, राजीव नगर, वासुदेव नगर आदि गांव बसे हुए हैं जिनका रास्ता ताज के पूर्वी गेट से होकर गुजरता है।

ताजमहल की सुरक्षा को लेकर प्रशासन ने ताज के पांच सौ मीटर से वाहनों के गुजरने पर प्रतिबंधित कर रखा है। पांच सौ मीटर के अंदर रहने वाले लोगों के लिए अधिकार पत्र जारी कर दिए हैं। जबकि यह गांव ताज से पांच सौ मीटर दूर बसे हैं, लेकिन इन गांव का रास्ता ताज से गुजरता है। गांव वालों को बैरियरों पर रोक लिया जाता है। शादी होकर आई नई दुल्हन को कई किलो मीटर पैदल चल कर गांव में पहुंचना पड़ता है। इस कारण लोगों ने इन गांव



नई दुल्हन को कई किलोमीटर पैदल चलकर पहुंचना पड़ता है ससुराल

ताजमहल की सुरक्षा आस-पास के लोगों के लिए बनी जी का जंजाल

लिए गुहार भी लगा चुके हैं, लेकिन आश्वासन के अलावा इन गांव वालों को कुछ नहीं मिला। 2008 में गांव के ओमप्रकाश की पत्नी के प्रसव पीड़ा के दौरान बैरियर पर ही बच्चे की मृत्यु हो गई थी।

नगला पैमा के पुरन सिंह (50) का कहना है कि ताजमहल से गांव वालों की समस्याएं दिनों दिन बढ़ रही हैं। गांव में शहनाई तक नहीं

में शादी संबंध करना बंद कर दिया है। गांव वालों के अनुसार पिछले नौ वर्षों से गांव में शहनाई तक नहीं बजी है। शादी ही नहीं इन गांव वालों को हारी-बीमारी में समस्याओं से जूझना पड़ता है। मरीज को लाने ले जाने के लिए एम्बुलेंस तक नहीं जा पाती है। मरीज को गांव से शहर तक पैदल या साइकिल से ले जाया जाता है। कई मरीज इन बैरियरों पर ही दम तोड़ चुके हैं। गांव के लोग प्रशासन से वैकल्पिक मार्ग के

बज रही है। नगला तल्फी के थान सिंह (35) का कहना है कि गांव की समस्या को लेकर तमाम गांव वाले अपनी जमीन बेच यहां से पलायन कर चुके हैं। यदि वैकल्पिक मार्ग के लिए जल्द प्रशासन ने नहीं सोचा तो एक दिन गांव खाली हो जाएगा। जिलाधिकारी मृत्युंजय कुमार नारायण ने बताया कि गांव के लिए वैकल्पिक मार्ग के प्रयास किए जा रहे हैं। एडीए और वन विभाग से इस मामले पर वार्ता चल रही है।

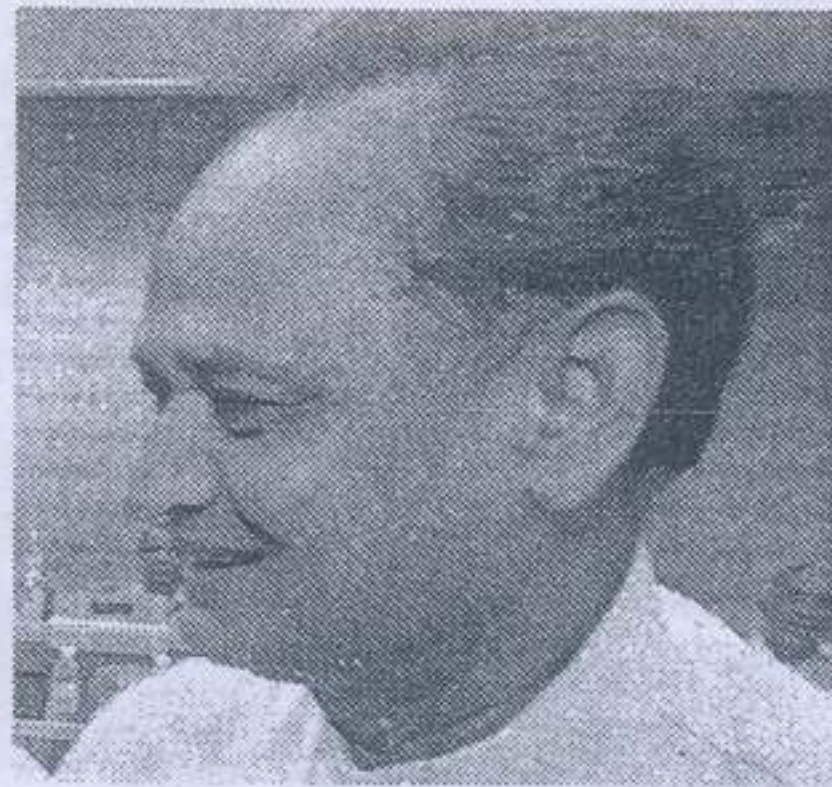
A model panchayat mirrors NREGS success

Sunny Sebastian

VIJAYPURA (RAJSAMAND): Showcasing Rajasthan's success story in the much talked about National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) was an intense one-day event which the organisers chose to call "*mela*" here in Vijaypura, a hitherto non-descript village in Rajsamand district along the Ajmer-Udaipur stretch of the Delhi-Mumbai National Highway No.8.

The number of activities for the day, which preceded a ten-day social audit *padyatra* by activists in villages across the area, included site visits by the Union and State Ministers for Rural Development, Union and State Secretaries for NREGS and Rural Development peppered by entertainment of the people's kind—*hela khayal*, songs of *Lehngas* and *Manganiars*, and the by now very popular puppet shows of the "Sangathan" (local reference for the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan).

But then why Vijaypura? "That is because many things have been experimented upon here successfully. Vijaypura has been a model panchayat for NREGS, maintaining all stipulated norms of transparency, accountability and efficiency. The local Sarpanch, Kalu Ram, is a Dalit who got elected to a general seat. A member of the MKSS,



RAJASTHAN HAS MADE A BEGINNING: Ashok Gehlot

he has many firsts to his credit from winning the election through a transparent campaign that incurred an expense of only Rs.800 to adhering to his election manifesto and the implementation of the transparency provisions," says Magsaysay Award winner Aruna Roy, the force behind the whole concept.

"If it can be done in Vijaypura, why not elsewhere?" asked Nikhil Dey, her associate at MKSS. He was confident that when it could be carried out in one panchayat it was possible not only in all 9,189 panchayats of Rajasthan but also in hundreds of thousands of panchayats across India.

The intermittent rain which got intense when Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot arrived at the venue for the closing plenary session came as bonus perhaps, as the huge turnout of village men and women made good use of the event, registering their com-

plaints at the grievance redress tent and checking with the panchayat authorities their entitlements and also freaking out with children at the food stalls.

It was also time to celebrate for the activists of the MKSS and the nascent School for Democracy over the victory of the very sentiment behind advocating and pioneering a revolutionary concept such as job guarantee, which stood vindicated with the return to power of the United Progressive Alliance Government with an added majority. It was a sort of thanksgiving meeting for Mr. Gehlot and Union Rural Development Minister C. P. Joshi, who happens to be from Rajsamand though he got elected to the Lok Sabha this time from Bhilwara.

"NREGS has the strength to change the face of the country. Rajasthan has made a beginning," Mr. Gehlot said after the other speakers had finished with the problem-solution rounds and suggestions for the future action plan, broad-basing the job scheme to include forestation, sanitation and public health and irrigation and water conservation.

"Rajasthan, a perennially drought-prone State, used to get a meagre Rs.250 crore only for drought relief in the past but now each district can claim Rs.250 to 300 crore a year under NREGS," the

Chief Minister pointed out.

In fact, the Chief Minister was only reiterating what Rita Sharma, Union Secretary for Rural Development, said at the plenary session. She revealed that nearly one-fifth of the NREGS allocation of Rs.27,000-28,000 crore went to Rajasthan and 40 per cent of those who sought jobs got 100 days' employment a year here.

It was not just the money as the empowering of the rural poor which is triggering off a whole lot of economic and social activities. "It is an enormous exercise which is bringing about development and change. As a result of the job scheme, the rural economy has started showing signs of recovery. Hundreds and thousands of bank and post office accounts have been opened in the names of villagers. Guaranteed work with a series of entitlements has made a noticeable difference. Also, the mandatory provisions of transparency under the Right to Information Act are helping them beat the chronic inability of the system to deliver," noted Mr. Dey.

What was remarkable at the *mela* was perhaps the jubilation of the public even when the payments in NREGS have been pending at some places since May. . But they all were thankful about the Act which is making a big difference to their life!

Rural development hit by corruption

EVEN as allocations for important rural development schemes like NREGS are increasing, there is also growing concern about the extent to which corruption and irregularities are denying the intended benefits to the poorest people who actually need them the most.

In this context a recent effort by the Patha Koli Nikar Manch (PKAM), an organisation of Kols active in the Patha region of Chitrakut district (Uttar Pradesh) to expose corruption and ask for immediate remedial steps, deserves wider attention and support.

Recently, the PKAM prepared a detailed report on various irregularities taking place in the implementation of various rural development programmes and schemes, complete with several annexures giving specific examples of corruption in various villages of the Patha region. After a public meeting and protest demonstration by Kols, other weaker sections and social activists, this report was handed over to district officials for forwarding it to the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh.

This report provides details about the tactics being used to plunder funds from the latest rural development schemes (as well as old ones), despite all the safeguards the new schemes are supposed to provide. In the case of NREGS, for example, fake records are being regularly prepared in many villages. Often actual workers are paid low wages while the names of persons close to the village *pradhan* mentioned in the records. These persons are paid a small amount without doing any work and if any inquiry is made they would say that they've been paid full wages.

Even though there are strict instructions for prompt payment in the case of NREGS, this report on the basis of inquiries in about a dozen panchayats was able to list several payments due to workers (most of whom had worked on NREGS) who had not been paid for several months. These payments amount to about Rs 13 lakh.

In some cases of corruption, bank officials are involved. In fact, some middlemen operate in villages as well as in banks to obtain commissions (cuts) on pensions given to old person, disabled

Fake records, bribery and middlemen dog NREGS, says
BHARAT DOGRA



persons and widows. It is said that the cases pushed by them are most likely to be accepted as they are very influential in the social welfare department and the banks.

In villages some middleman with a register and a mobile phone approach old people and pretend to obtain the approval for pension on mobile phone (even though the middleman may be talking not to an official but just to a friend) if some

payment can be made for speeding up the paper. In this way bribes are collected even from the poorest people. Similarly middlemen are also active in work relating to *kisan* credit cards, loans and insurance payment etc.

In addition the provision of transparency links in several schemes like NREGS are being violated on a large scale. Even when efforts are made to obtain specific information under the right to information law, generally this proves quite difficult.

However, when a voluntary organisation could conduct proper social audits (in villages like Itwara) then large-scale corruption in rural development works was well established.

In the case of land-distribution the Patha region has seen good land distribution among Kols and other weaker sections, thanks mainly to the dedicated work done by voluntary organisation ABSS (which has close links with the PKAM). Despite this there are still several examples of Kols who have been denied land by corrupt *lekhpals* (officials) who took bribes from them but did not complete the measurement and proper work.

Then there are other cases in which land consolidation officials transferred fertile land belonging to the poorer families to rich and influential landowners. Some settlements of the poor are denied proper homestead land status, so that the poor still live in danger of being evicted and due to this fear agree to perform free services to local dominant persons.

After the recent enactment of a legislation to protect tribal rights over forest land cultivated by them, follow-up steps at the local level to strengthen the land claims of people in several hamlets have been delayed.

These and other complaints listed by the PKAM provide a useful indication of the ways in which the good intentions of important government schemes like NREGS are being subverted. One hopes that the government will take suitable measures so that corruption and irregularities listed in such reports can be substantially eliminated.

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Rural sector could have done with more thrust, funds

PNS ■ New Delhi

While rural development has received the expected attention, there is little in the Budget to show there is new vigour to take the task of eradicating poverty forward.

The allocation in Plan and non-Plan expenditure showed there was no movement further beyond NREGA, a labour-based programme providing wage for work for 100 days per family per annum.

While the Government was trying to take the credit for an increase of Rs 9,100 crore over last year's expenditure of Rs 30,000 crore, it just showed the Government was not going to close the programme despite widespread criticism from certain quarters.

However, the Government has taken cognisance of prob-

lems in the areas of asset creation with the NREGA money. It seems the Government would also involve NREGA in ongoing rural development programmes like road and forest development that were till now not provided for in the guidelines of the programme. But convergence with water resources and land resources was already going on and labour was free to develop non-arable land through NREGA money.

Observers feel that this convergence is a good idea and the Government's move to run pilot project in 115 districts out of almost 600 districts would facilitate creation of good viewable assets with grater input of machines. But it would also limit the employment in rural areas to 100 days, as the workers earlier could get employed through NREGA and also elsewhere. However,

through the convergence, there would be little scope for non-NREGA employment, as much of the activities would fall within NREGA.

But this may cheer the farmers as they could get labour during harvest season, since the labour would try to secure the 100 days guarantee for leaner times.

In Indira Awas Yojana, the provision for BPL families has been increased to Rs 8,800 crore that will increase the number of houses not the quality. A provision should have been made to enhance the allocation per house in the face of rising cost of building material. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, one of the most successful and impactful programmes of the Ministry, has been given an enhancement to Rs 12,000 crore, a marginal increase from the actual expenditure of 2008-09.