

# Aiyar: Centre to keep tab on Panchayat funds.

Rajeev Ranjan Roy

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Union Panchayati Raj Minister Mani Sanker Aiyer on Wednesday informed the Lok Shaba That the Centre would keep electronic tab on the funds allocated for panchayat institutions to ensure that money was optimally utilized to carry out developmental works at the grass roots level.

“Panchayati Raj is the only solution to eradicate corruption from the system. It would bring a real turnaround in the real life. So we have decided electronically tag and track the utilization of funds by Panchayats. All the details to the effect of funds utilization would be just a click away”, Aiyar said.

In over three-hour long reply to the discussion on report on the ‘State of Panchayats – A mid-term review and appraisal 2006’ Aiyar said that Panchayats hold the key not only to the rural poverty and basic infrastructural upgradation, but would also address the problem of naxalism.

“The weapons cannot check naxalism, but Panchayats can”, he asserted.

He said that the Centre has proposed to give incentives to the best performing panchayats. “Gram Sabhas are the people’s parliament. They are not the centres of contractors. We need to strengthen them. The Ministry in consultation with the state Governments has mandated that no panchayat would get funds unless the district planning is done at the local level,” he said.

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Referring to the problem of infrastructure and other logistics in running gram Sabhas effectively. Aiyar said that the Government would ensure that every Gram Sabha has a proper building and adequate staff to carry out developmental works. "If we need South and North Blocks to run India, Gram Sabhas must have the buildings to sit and work out action plans," he added.

The Minister said that efforts were on to secure financial support from UNDP to build the Capacity of Panchayati institutions and develop the skills of the people associated with them. "We are moving towards the right direction in a scientific manner. There will be devolution of functional and financial activities. There is no scope for any kind of confusion at any levels," Aiyar said.

Aiyar said that Panchayati Raj had led to the empowerment of the women in general and women from the weaker sections of the society in particular.

"Among ST representatives in the Panchayat bodies, almost 65 per cent of them are women. The overall representation of SC/ST women in the local bodies is 31 per cent. It is great change taking place at the grass root level," he said.

"Such a huge representation of women in the local bodies is unparalleled in the world. There are 32 lakh representatives in local bodies in the country. There are 10 lakh women representatives in panchayats countrywide. They are doing a fantastic job," Aiyar added.

# India can find inspiration from its local success stories.

Renuka Bisht

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India is a signatory to the millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people without access to sanitation by 2015. As only less than a quarter of our citizens use sanitary facilities today, it does not look like we are going to keep this date.

Millions of Indians are forced to defecate in bags, buckets, fields, streams and roadside ditches. Although most of the people without sanitation coverage live in remote rural areas and urban slums that are the hardest to service, here we highlight successful modes that when replicated can accelerate improved sanitation across the country.

The first block in the country to achieve 100 per cent sanitation was Nandigram-II in West Bengal. By 2003, all the households in the block had been furnished with toilets, which improved both the community surroundings and health. Ram Krishna Mission, with state government and UNICEF support, set up a local production and supply infrastructure. This arrangement not only supplies inexpensive sanitary materials, it also props up local livelihoods. After following this example statewide, sanitation coverage in west Bengal has increased from almost zero to over eighty per cent.

Also in 2003, the Thandavampatti gamlet in Tamil Nadu became the first rural habitation to be declared open defecation free. Here the local administration collaborated with Gramalaya and women's groups. With Water Partners International chipping in as well, the Kanganipatti village also pulled off a similar feat. In the countdown to 2006, the villagers constructed 117 toilets in 100 hours!

If the above examples involve different sections of civil society teaming up to improve sanitation, groundbreaking public private partnerships are also pursuing similar objectives. Tirupur, also in Tamil Nadu, which generates a billion dollars through knitwear exports every year, offers a particularly promising example. While USAID provided important technical support, the private sector raised Rs.1,023 crore for a comprehensive urban project. This is intended to provide inexpensive sanitation for 80,000 slum residents, meet the growing demands of industrial users, and provide the town with its first sewage system. Alandur and Chennai are also updating urban infrastructure on a commercially viable basis.

## GLOBAL ROLE MODELS

**TAJKISTAN:** More than 11,000 children are engaged in an outreach programme on sanitation.

**PAKISTAN:** In the slums of Karachi, the sanitation programme involves 90% of the population, and the infant mortality rate has dropped from 130 to 0.

The female masons constructing, installing and maintaining sanitation blocks in Gujrat and Kerala would concur that improving sanitation is good business. Women can also be particularly potent triggers for improving sanitation services because they suffer worse indignities and insecurity when they relieve themselves in the open. In general, capacity

building across gender, class and caste lines is key to making sanitation socially and economically sustainable.

In Maharashtra where over 2000 gram panchayats now have 100 per cent sanitation, the construction of public toilets for millions of slum residents has been carried out in consultation with the users. The social impact of this participatory approach cannot be overestimated. In a peculiarly millennial update to caste-based scavenging, Chand Ram, the caretaker of a public, toilet block in Dharavi, has said, “My family has cleaned toilets for generations. Here I and three of my family provide 24-hour attendance in four shifts. each of us earns Rs 1,500 a month. I had never dreamt of finding such a job, and with such accommodation, in Mumbai.”

It is no wonder that the new-famous Sulabh model has been delivering sanitation to poor and low-caste Indians on a commercial rather than charity basis. For a fee of about one rupee, 10 million petty traders, laborers, domestic workers and other use Sulabh facilities today.

Finally it is important to invest in children as agents of change. Student bridges in Bangladesh and Tajikistan have effectively taken sanitation messages from their schools to their communities.

In India, Rajasthan’s primary education councils have gotten together with UNICEF to promote sanitation in more than half of the 4300 schools the districts of Alwar and Tonk. It is planned that all the schools in the state will have sanitation facilities by 2007. In a salutary footnote on the spin-offs of sanitation, girls’ enrolment has already risen by 78 percent.



