

Rural water supply: Bharat Nirman targets remain largely unachieved

Ravnish Tiwari

The Indian Express, 2nd July 2007

Halfway through the UPA government's ambitious programme to provide sources of safe drinking water to all rural habitations under Bharat Nirman, very little has been done.

Of the, 1,95,813 habitations identified in 2005 as having water sources contaminated by chemicals like iron, arsenic, fluoride, nitrates, sulphates, or other salts, only 9,754 – about 5 per cent – have been provided with safe alternatives.

This is coming up for discussion at the meeting of state water supply ministers, to be inaugurated by the prime minister later this week.

In the first two years of the programme, the government set itself the modest target of 25,000 habitations. But statistics available with the Department of drinking Water supply indicates that less than 40 per cent of the target was achieved.

Expect for states like Gujarat, Mizoram, Tamil Nadu, and Pudusherry, most other fail to achieve targets that were set for them. According to statistics, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Maharastra, Orrissa, Rajasthan, and Utter Pradesh have been identified as needing urgent attention.

The Department of Drinking Water Supply is planning to reset targets this year. The aim is to cover 65,000 habitations, including those left out in the last two years of the programme.

The centre has allocated Rs. 6,700 crore for the programme in 2007, of which 20 per cent will be spent on habitations whose sources has been contaminated with chemicals.

Worst-Off	
STATE	HABITATIONS
Rajasthan	30,787
Assam	28,181
Orissa	27,492
Bihar	24,714
Karnataka	18,988
West Bengal	17,743

However, the programme has done well in covering villages that have faced problems because of a falling water table. Of the 3.3 lakh habitations that have slipped back from coverage owing to depletion of ground water, more than 50 per cent have received attention. Some 90,000 more are being targeted this year.

Green veggies missing from rural menu

Rajeev Ranjan Roy

The Pioneer, 23rd July 2007

Contrary to the general perception a government survey has found the rural Indians lackluster attitude in growing and consuming green vegetables.

The green vegetables don't dominate their daily menu at all. Only 35 per cent of rural households consume some green veggies like radish, pumpkin, gourd, and spinach. Only 10 per cent of them consume homegrown veggies.

Among fruits, they prefer coconut, guava and mango. After rice, milk is the most favoured item for them. The latest survey of National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) on the consumption of foods by the rural Indians suggests that 85 per cent households take rice a month, while 71 per cent of them get milk is home-produced, and the rest they buy from the open market.

The survey suggests that over 80 per cent of the rural consumers, of green vegetables and fruits like mangoes and guava, buy these items from the local market. Only 10 per cent rural households consume homegrown potatoes, while 19 per cent of them consume homegrown spinach. Since spinach is not so costly, the majority of rural-folk manage to have palak to remain healthy.

Among the non-vegetarians items, they prefer eggs and chickens. The survey says that 33 and 20 per cent rural households take eggs and chicken respectively in their diets monthly. Around 13 per cent of them used to be homegrown, while 87 per cent purchased them from the local markets.

Contrary to the general perception that rural people have easy access to the green vegetables, majority of them do prefer potatoes to others or they cannot afford green vegetables. As many as 75 per cent rural households consume spinach in their daily diet, perhaps because of the fact that the iron rich stuff is easily and cheaply available.

“The vegetables like radish, arum, pumpkin, cucumber and French beans hardly figure in their daily menu. Only 25 per cent households reported to consume radish, arum and pumpkin in a month, while 40 and 22 per cent of them get gourd and cucumber respectively in their daily diets,” a government official said.

Though rural India is known for producing mangoes and guavas, the people surprising do not have access to them. Only 13 per cent of the rural households reported to consume guava production is a common feature in the rural area. In the case of mangoes, only 14 per cent households consume mangoes.

“Since guavas and mangoes are also considered to be a cash crop, it is found that the rural folk sell them off in the local market to meet their other requirements and depend upon the left-over for personal consumption. However, there were not many such households”, the official said.

Like green veggies, the pulses too do not figure so prominently in the rural people's daily menu. Only 36 per cent of them have pulses in their food, and they prefer *arhur* to gram. "Though consumption of pulses varies from state to state, the over all consumption of pulse is limited to a section of the rural folk", the official added.