PEO Study N0.111

ACCESSIBILITY OF THE POOR TO THE RURAL WATER SUPPLY - A QUICK EVALUATION STUDY - 1980

1. The Study

Accelerated rural water Supply (ARP) was introduced in 1972-73 with the main objective of providing drinking water in the difficult areas and problem villages (1.53 lakhs) as identified by the Assessment Survey, 1972. The programme gained momentum during the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79) and formed an integral part of the Minimum Needs Programme (MNP). However, it was observed that, left to the State Govts themselves, the provision of drinking water got stuck-up in the conflict of priorities. Action was, therefore, initiated by the Govt. of India during 1977-78 to implement the scheme in respect of problem villages by reviving the Centrally Sponsored Scheme and allocating a sum of Rs.38.20 crores to State Govts under the cent per cent grant assistance. The programme continued in 1978-79 also.

The experience manifested that the most of the benefits of the Welfare and development Schemes had so far been seized by the economically better off sections of the community and the poor had been deprived of their due share. It was with this background in view that the Programme Evaluation Organisation, at the instance of the Planning Commission, undertook a Quick Evaluation Study of the Accessibility of the Poor to the Rural Water Suply and brought out its report in 1980.

2. Objectives

i) To ascertain the relative location of water points in areas inhabited by the `poor' and the `non poor' in the villages covered under the MNP/ARP;

ii) To find out the proportionate share of the `poor' and the `non poor' in the water available from such points.

iii) To understand the reasons for low or no share of the poor;

iv) To study the alternative sources of drinking water if the full requirements of the `poor' were not met from sources provided under the MNP/ARP; and

v) To suggest ways and means for correcting the imbalances, if any.

3. **Sample size Criteria for selection of Sample**

The study covered 17 States of the country. The study was taken up by all the 34 field teams of the PEO including those of the Regional Evaluation Offices. If the scheme was in operation in the Headquarters districts of the PEO units, the same were selected for the study. If not, the nearest district where the scheme was in operation was chosen. Within the selected districts, the blocks having the maximum number of villages under the MNP/ARP were selected. From each selected block, three villages were selected from among those villages where drinking water was provided under the Scheme. In the final stage, 10% of the `poor' households with a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 25 were selected randomly from each of the three selected villages. The `poor' were operationally defined as those who belonged to SCs, STs and landless Agricultural Labourers other than SCs and STs. The final sample consisted of 34 districts, 34 blocks, 99 villages and 1,174 poor households (which could be decomposed into 778 SCs, 82 STs and 314 Landless Agricultural Labourer households) scattered over 17 States.

4. **Reference Period**

The field work was conducted during October/December, 1978. Broad data on the availability of water supply points were collected for the period 1974-78.

5. **Main Findings**

1. Wherever the Panchayati Raj Institutions were vested with the onus of maintenance and repairs of the drinking water points (in about 26.48% of sample districts), the situation was better than those areas where the Public Health Engineering Department performed this task.

2. Drinking water was made available mainly through bored/tube/drilled wells and pipes in all the 34 districts covered under the MNP. Of these, 16 districts were covered both under the MNP and ARP. About 90% of piped water supply points and 84% of the bored/tube/drilled wells with hand pumps were provided under the MNP. The average number of supply points per village under the MNP/ARP worked out to 8.

3. Many conclusions emanating from the study went generally in line with the castigation on the welfare schemes initiated by the Government that they might often turn out to be pro non-poor. The localities were categorised into three i.e. areas inhabited exclusively by the `poor' ( 34% of the total sample area), areas inhabited exclusively by the `non-poor' (17% of the total sample area) and areas inhabited by both the `poor' and the non poor' (49% of the total area). The percentage shares of these three categories in the drinking water points provided under the MNP/ARP programme were 16, 19 and 65 respectively. Taking only public points, the share of the first category remained the same, of the second category came down from 19% to 14% and of the third category went up from 65% (only this figure included both private and public points) to 70% . The average number of drinking water points per locality in these three categories was o.8, 1.9 and 2.5 respectively. Taking only the public points, the corresponding numbers were 0.6, 1.1 and 1.9 respectively. Similarly, the drinking water points provided under the piped water supply were comparatively less (9.8 per cent) in the localities of the `poor' as compared to those in the localities of the non poor' (16.7 per cent).

4. Of the poor respondents who were aware (95.6%) of the drinking water points in the villages, 65% reported the use of these points either regularly (39.8 per cent) or partly (24.8 per cent). The reported reasons for non-use or partial use included the distance of points from the homestead, availability of alternative sources, frequent breakdowns, unsuitable timings, drying up in summer & the feeling that the points were "meant for higher caste groups".

5. Of the poor respondents who had reported availability of drinking water, 51% considered the water provided through bored/tube/drilled wells as inadequate, while 45% considered piped water inadequate. Despite the majority (53.4%) of the poor respondents being aware of the deleterious effects of the use of water collected from open dugwells, rivers, ponds, lakes, etc. 51% of them used the water from open dugwells, while 40 % went in for individual collection from ponds, tanks, lakes, river, spring etc.

6 Major Suggestions

1. There is a need to reinforce the criterion for the selection of "problem villages" to enable the plan formulation on a more realistic basis.

2. The location of the supply points should be most convenient so that the harmful alternative sources will not be made use of. The understanding of the caste structure of the village may prove useful in deciding upon the location of supply points.

3. The localities inhabited exclusively by the poor should be provided with the requisite number of drinking water points. Efforts should be made for converting open dug wells into sanitary wells.

4. Regular repair and maintenance of drinking water points, extension education to the poor regarding the ill-effects of the use of contaminated water and vigilant monitoring of the scheme are the other areas which call for effective action.