

Ghar Ghar Nal ka Jal (every household with tapped water)

An ambitious program of the state government in Bihar

By Neeraj K Dubey

Clean water, a right for all

Water plays the most important role in human life and is imperative for survival. A person can survive for some time without food, but life without water is impossible, therefore the saying, "Water is life."

Though scientific advancements are making the lives of people easier, the trade off is increasing pressure on our natural resources, in the form of environmental deterioration, including the quality and availability of water resources.

Rural areas remained less affected by pollution in the past, but that is no longer the case. With the growing demand for food to meet the increasing population, chemical fertilizers and pesticides have made agriculture easier for the farmers, but it has affected the environment and, most importantly, the groundwater, which has high levels of contamination. People have no choice but to use the contaminated water because no alternative is available. In cities, households use water purifiers, but getting access to clean drinking water in rural areas is more and more rare. Most people are using contaminated water, which adversely affects their health and their family income.

Given these problems, the state government of Bihar in their seven resolves for a better Bihar came up with a plan for providing clean water, named as "*Ghar Ghar Nal ka Jal.*" Under this scheme, there is a provision for providing clean water to each village household through a pipeline, so that people can get clean water that is free from fluoride, arsenic, and iron.



The scheme implemented at the ward level calls for the constitution of a *Ward Vikas Kriyanvayan evam Prabandhan Samiti* (Ward Development, Implementation and Management Committee) under the leadership of ward members. This committee constituted through the *Ward Sabha* implements this scheme and gives directions for the maintenance. The ward secretary and ward members do the survey of scheduled caste families in their wards and present it to the panchayat. Based on this survey, and depending on the numbers of scheduled caste families, they select the wards for implementation of the scheme. Wards having the highest number of scheduled caste families get priority.

A selected ward member informs people in their ward through *Ward Sabha* about the implementation of the scheme and opens a bank account in the name of *Ward Vikas evam Prabandhan Samiti*. Further, they give the details to the *mukhiya* (head) of the panchayat to get the amount sanctioned to start the work. The panchayat secretary and mukhiya prepare the document for the scheme and send it to the Block Development Officer for acceptance. Upon the acceptance from the block development officer, the junior engineer takes the measurements of the ward, draws an estimate of the project and submits it back to the mukhiya and panchayat secretary. The mukhiya and panchayat secretary, after going through the estimate, issue a cheque amounting to 40 percent of total cost in the name of *Ward Vikas evam Prabandhan Samiti*. The ward member after completion of a certain degree of work releases the remaining amount.

The scheme is ambitious, but starting the project in any ward is difficult on the ground. The multi-level approval, acceptance, and involvement of different departments makes it a case of delay and denial. Understanding the rules and regulations of the scheme by the ward members and panchayat representatives calls for their capacity building. In addition, coordination between the different panchayat representatives (especially mukhiya and ward members) is also a big issue. With so many stakeholders involved, there is disagreement about who keeps the control. This fight for the right to implement the scheme went to the court, and the court decided to put the work in the hands of ward members of respective wards.

Under the Good Rural Governance program of Sehgal Foundation, the foundation team representatives helped start the scheme in a few panchayat wards. Team members held many meetings with mukhiyas and ward members to enable better coordination between them. They worked hard with the community and panchayat representatives to make them aware of the scheme and promote better understanding of the rules and regulations. Consistent efforts by the team led to the initiation of the work in five wards of Punas panchayat, and in three wards of *Ajna* and *Balbhadrapur Khajuri* panchayat in district *Samastipur* in Bihar. The work for the scheme in these areas is in progress.

After the scheme will be operational across all wards, villagers will receive one water connection with three taps in their houses (each at the door, kitchen, and toilet), making water available for drinking, cooking, and other work. This will save time that can be devoted to other productive work. Availability of clean and uncontaminated water will reduce the incidence of many diseases such as gastroenteritis, cholera, cryptosporidium, diarrheal disease, dysentery, giardiasis typhoid fever, and those caused by viruses, bacterium, protozoa, and worms, which will enable people to lead healthier lives.

(Neeraj Dubey is coordinator, Good Rural Governance, Bihar, with S M Sehgal Foundation)