ABSTRACT

Community management has emerged as a plausible solution for sustainable water supply in rural areas the world over. Banking on the rich tradition of public action, Kerala has taken a bold initiative in implementing some rural water supply programmes in the community management mode. In the league of such programmes is Jalanidhi, implemented by the Government of Kerala with World Bank assistance. The present research aims (i) to find the impact of community managed rural water supply schemes in Kerala and (ii) to suggest measures to re-engineer Jalanidhi so as to meet the drinking water and sanitation requirements of the rural population in a better manner. As the trend for community management model is catching on, a critical review and analysis of programmes belonging to this model is relevant and essential. With Jalanidhi entering its second phase of execution, suggestions on re-engineering are crucial to help the programme better plan, implement and monitor its schemes.

The critical review and analysis of community managed rural water supply schemes is done mainly with secondary data, though it has been supplemented at times with field observations and interviews with officials involved in them. A Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threat (SWOT) analysis is also done with a view to assess the suitability of the programmes in Kerala’s context.

The study on Jalanidhi is done through primary and secondary data. Forty schemes from eight grama panchayaths taken from the four districts of Thrissur, Palakkad, Kozhikkode and Malappuram in Kerala have been selected for the study. The samples have been so selected as to include schemes belonging to general, coastal and tribal communities. These schemes belong to the first and second batches of Jalanidhi and have completed more than five years. Data have been gathered using questionnaires as the primary instrument and the respondents include over six hundred households, facilitators and decision makers at various levels. The research employs both qualitative and statistical analyses. Cross-examination between data gathered through surveys and interviews ensures
validity. The verification of data from schemes having similar characteristics has been done to ensure reliability.

Results indicate the criticality of parameters influencing the performance of Jalanidhi. While the simplicity, appropriateness, economy and optimality of the service are instrumental in ensuring sufficient quantity of potable water, the efficiency and effectiveness of the scheme depends on its management. The need for continued support of the authorities and the role that can be played by the Kerala Water Authority, which is the nodal agency of the Government of Kerala for water supply services are also investigated. The research underscores the need for technological and process re-engineering in Jalanidhi and outlines a comprehensive framework for execution of schemes.

Since the social, technological and institutional dimensions of community managed schemes have a bearing on its performance, the analysis of the schemes with focus on Jalanidhi underscores the suitability of the model in the Kerala scenario and suggests methods for its improvement.