Abstract

Rural India has more than 700 million people residing in about 1.42 million habitations spread over 15 diverse ecological regions. Meeting the drinking water needs of such a large population can be a daunting task. The non-uniformity in level of awareness, socio-economic development, education, poverty, practices and rituals and water availability add to the complexity of the task. Despite an estimated total of Rs. 1,105 billion spent on providing safe drinking water since the First Five Year Plan was launched in 1951, lack of safe and secure drinking water continues to be a major hurdle and a national economic burden.

A Punjab Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project is an initiative of Government of Punjab. Government of India and World Bank initiate reform the water supply and sanitation sector in the rural areas of the Punjab state. The Punjab State comprises of 20 districts having 12248 villages with 11930 gram panchayats. Rural population of the State is 166 million. The Government of Punjab is keen to reform the Rural Water Supply & Sanitation Sector to improve sustainability and standard of rural water supply & sanitation in the state. Towards this end, Department of Water Supply and Sanitation (DWSS) Punjab has developed a new Rural Water Supply & Sanitation (RWSS) policy framework.

The main developmental objectives of this program is to improve the quality of rural water supply and environmental sanitation service delivery, sanitation and hygiene, to achieve sustainability of investments and generate health and income benefits in the State of Punjab by involving Panchayati Raj Institutions and local communities. The institutional entity at the village level for program implementation will be Gram Panchayat Water Sanitation Committee (GPWSC) selected by the Gram Sabha working in partnership with the Gram Panchayat. The GPWSC will be constituted as a recognized body under section 25 of the Punjab Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. The Sarpanch will be the ex-officio chairperson of the GPWSC. The Gram Sabha will directly select the remaining members of the GPWSC. The GPWSC members will select a Secretary and Treasurer. The Junior Engineer of the DWSS in-charge of the village will be the technical member cum convenor of the GPWSC. GPs / GPWSCs will be responsible for planning, technology selection (type of scheme), procurement (bid invitation, award), construction and operation and maintenance management of all new water schemes and for all intra-village water supply works of multi village water supply schemes.
Since the implementation of PRWSS project is just not limited to the participation of community members and GPWSC members but also intends to look into the effects on the quality of life of the community members as well. The PRWSS project has started from 2008 still there is not a single study on this project but thus a need was felt to understand and evaluate the functioning, awareness and performance of the beneficiaries and the GPWSC committees towards achievement of the PRWSS goals.

The methodology adopted for the present study is primarily descriptive, interpretive and evaluative in nature. It attempts mainly to capture the Functioning of Gram Panchaiyat Water Supply Committees under Punjab Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Ropar District. For the purpose of evaluating the GPWSC, a random sample of 300 respondents were drawn, out of which 100 respondents were selected from GPWSC members and the remaining 200 non-member beneficiaries. The study covered 20 villages of Ropar District where the Punjab Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project were implemented. To give an equal representation to each village and each committee, 5 members from each committee and 10 non-members were randomly selected as the proposed sample. The tools for data collection were mainly Structured Interview Schedule and on the spot observation from the selected sample of the present study.

The study points to the need for improving different aspects of the functioning of the Gram Panchayat Water Supply and Sanitation Committee based on the findings. The major changes needed for improving the overall working of the GPWSC’s are that paradigm Shift is required for determination of membership to GPWSCs. The improve coordination among the members of the GPWSCs. The GPWSCs members should be provided some financial incentives or rewards. The work load of the chairman should be lessened. The periodic trainings are very important for increasing the awareness of the members on procedures followed for nominations, formation and functions of GPWSCs.

The focus of the present investigation was on the working of Gram panchayat Water Supply and Sanitation Committees alone in the Ropar district of Punjab. The researcher feels that the study can be extended to other districts of the State along with other Indian States. There is a scope for another study specifically on the problems of the GPWSCs and the suggestions there from. Since the sample of the present study was primarily the GPWSCs members, another study is also possible with the respondents drawn from the community people who are not the members of the GPWSCs.