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# COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF RURAL WATER SYSTEMS

Community water<sup>plus</sup>

COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT HAS CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANTLY TO IMPROVEMENTS IN RURAL WATER SUPPLIES IN INDIA. HOWEVER THOSE SUPPLIES ARE ONLY SUSTAINABLE WHEN COMMUNITIES RECEIVE APPROPRIATE LEVELS OF SUPPORT. THIS RESEARCH PROJECT WILL INVESTIGATE THE EXTENT OF SUPPORT REQUIRED IN SUCCESSFUL, COMMUNITY-MANAGED RURAL WATER SUPPLY PROGRAMMES AND APPROACHES ACROSS INDIA.

Photo by: Mekala Snehalatha



Photo by: Stef Smits/ IRC

## INTRODUCTION

Community management has long been recognised to be critical for rural water supply services delivery. Indeed, community management has contributed significantly to improvements in rural water supplies. However those supplies are only sustainable when communities receive appropriate levels of support from government and other entities in their service delivery tasks.

Communities may need easy access to call-down maintenance staff from government entities, they may need support from civil society organisations to renew their management structures and they may need to professionalise—that is, the outsourcing of certain tasks to specialised individuals or enterprises. This is what is referred to as the “plus”—the necessary add-ons to sustain community water supply. Without such support, community management rarely

performs well at scale, and is then not an appropriate management model to achieve sustainable services.

In spite of the existence of success stories in community management, mechanisms for support and professionalisation have not yet been scaled up in policies and strategies. Success stories then remain pockets of achievement. The necessary support comes at a price, and sometimes a significant one. Support costs governments and donors additional resources in the short term, but it is likely to deliver better and more sustainable services in the long term. Also the balance between community engagement and support from outsiders differs according to factors, such as the technology employed or settlement size. It is often not clear what the right mix will need to be in promoting and scaling up successful models.

## OBJECTIVE

The research will investigate functioning, successful, community-managed rural water supply programmes and approaches across India. It will examine a range of technologies and supporting entities in order to determine the extent of support required to sustain services, across varying degrees of community engagement.

## APPROACH

The research starts from a scoping exercise to map out the range of best practices in community management across India. From the scoping study, 18 cases of rural water supply programmes reflecting a high degree of community management will be selected for in-depth research. Degrees of success will be assessed and measured based on the following:

### The level of community management

Our premise is that community empowerment is an important feature in itself, and that the degrees to which communities manage their services is a reflection of that empowerment.

### Service levels

Success is determined by the level of service, in terms of the quantity, quality, reliability

and accessibility of water received by users. Here service levels across all 18 cases will be assessed, and the degree of equity achieved in each characterised.

### Performance of the service provider

As community-based organisations are fulfilling the functions of a service provider, particularly in operation and maintenance and administration, their performance in these functions will be assessed, based on indicators developed by the research.

Correlations between these three groups of indicators will be explored and factors that have contributed to the success of the support environment will be identified.

Throughout the research, the team will engage with policy makers at national and state levels, through stakeholder meetings and a steering committee. The steering committee will provide strategic guidance on the research approach, validate research findings, and review the study's implications on policy making and strategy development for community-managed rural water supplies.

## EXPECTED OUTPUTS

A series of **policy briefs** that highlight findings of the research and its policy implications.

A series of **working papers** describing the research methodology and its findings.

A set of **18 case studies** that provides an assessment of the success of each.

An **assessment report** on the successful **models for management and support** to rural water supply in India.

A **guideline document**, with proposed **categories of management models and support entities** fit to different contexts in India, providing guidance on trajectories for their further development.

**Inputs** into national and state-level **capacity building programmes** based on research findings.

Papers and presentations at **international and national events**.

## MORE INFORMATION

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Visit the project webpage here:

[www.waterservicesthatlast.org/countries/india\\_community\\_water\\_initiative](http://www.waterservicesthatlast.org/countries/india_community_water_initiative)



Photo by: Ingeborg Krukkert/ IRC

The research is being undertaken by a consortium led in India by IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre from The Netherlands, the Administrative Staff College of India (based in Hyderabad), the Centre of Excellence for Change (based in Chennai) and Malawaya National Institute of Technology (based in Jaipur), with overall project coordination by Cranfield University from the United Kingdom.

The research has been funded by AusAID through the AusAID Development Awards Research Scheme under an award titled Community Management of Rural Water Supply Systems in India. AusAID is particularly interested in understanding issues of community management of water in India—a country which is considered as leading the way in scaling up rural water supply services—so as to replicate these best practices in their development programmes in other parts of Asia and Africa.

The views expressed in this brochure are those of the research team's and not necessarily those of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Commonwealth of Australia accepts no responsibility for any loss, damage or injury, resulting from reliance on any of the information or views contained in this brochure.