

Discussion on Safe Drinking Water and its Policy Framework

"Access to safe water is a fundamental human need and therefore a basic human right."

Kofi Annan, Ex. United Nations Secretary General

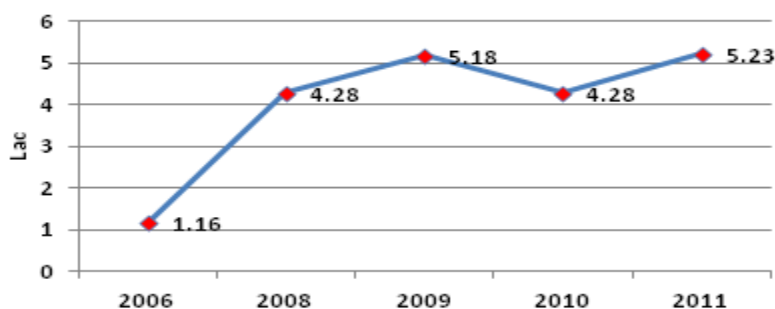
India's huge and growing population is putting a severe strain on all of the country's natural resources. Although access to drinking water has improved, the World Bank estimates that 21% of communicable diseases in India are related to unsafe water. In India, diarrhoea alone causes more than 1,600 deaths daily. Hygiene practices also continue to be a problem in India. Latrine usage is extremely poor in rural areas of the country; only 14% of the rural population has access to a latrine.

Access to safe water for drinking and other domestic needs still continues to be a problem in many areas. Water for sanitation and hygiene is an even more serious problem. Inadequate sanitation and lack of sewage treatment are polluting the water sources.

The studies and observations clearly indicate the need for household water treatment and awareness on consequences of open defecation and poor personal and storage hygiene and diseases associated with it.

- "The Sample Registration Survey (SRS) report suggests that diarrhoea is among the top 10 causes of death among infants and children 0-4 years of age. About 10 per cent of infants and 14 per cent of 0-4 year children die due to diarrhoea in India".
- Indian infants, below the age of five, make for one-fourth of the total global deaths due to diarrhoea-related causes.
- Of the 610,000 infants below the age of five years who die because of severe gastroenteritis or diarrhoea, nearly 152,000 are Indians, said Rohit Agarwal, president-elect of the Indian Association of Pediatricians".

In Tamil Nadu, Acute Diarrhoeal Diseases (ADD) has risen from 1.16 Lakh cases in 2006 to 5.23 Lakh cases in 2011, a 4.5 fold increase over the last 5 years. Infants, children and elderly people are the vulnerable population for ADD due to their weak immune system. Waterborne diseases are due to faecal contamination of drinking water that includes diseases like gastroenteritis, diarrhoea and dysentery, collectively termed as Acute Diarrhoeal Diseases (ADD). In addition to ADD, other infectious waterborne diseases are Typhoid, Hepatitis and Cholera.



In Tamil Nadu, approximately 79.8% Households receive tap water of which 55.9% is treated water while 23.9% untreated and 3.8 % of the well water is from uncovered sources. In Tamil Nadu 51.7% of the households have no access to latrines; in urban 24.9% and rural 76.8% households have no latrines (Census of India, 2011).



The Multi District Assessment on Water Safety (MDAWS) was carried out by TWAD Board - Tamil Nadu and UNICEF in 2007-08 to assess the microbiological contamination in public water supply in rural Dharmapuri District. Out of a total of 400 water sources (363 Public Water Distribution System – taps and 37 bore-well hand-pumps) analyzed, 91.3% showed faecal coliform (human faecal matter) contamination and 70.0% with faecal streptococci (animal faecal matter). ***The results emphasis water at Point of Use needs to be treated.***

The lack of adequate trained personnel for scientific planning, utilizing modern techniques and analytical capabilities incorporating information technology constrains good water management.

The above incidences and reports emphasized the importance of Household Water Treatment Systems (HWTS) to ensure safe drinking water to citizens and decrease the infectious disease burden. There are various HWTS methods are available and usage of the same has to be strengthened. However, a few aspects needs to be considered, like Choice of a HWTS, Cost effectiveness, Affordability, Sustainability and Availability of parts and Maintenance.

Right to Life is the fundamental rights as per the Article 21, Constitution of India. In India, The Supreme Court has ruled that both **water and sanitation** are part of the constitutional right to life (Article 21). The Court has stated that 'the right to access to **clean drinking water** is fundamental to life and there is a duty on the state under Article 21 to provide clean drinking water to its citizens'.

Recognizing the right to water and sanitation domestically is intrinsic to fulfilling the right; it entitles individuals to demand it politically, administratively and judicially. As a result of constitutional recognition, development and interpretation of legislation and policies must be in accordance to the right.

Draft National Policy on Water and Sanitation has been released, which does not concentrate and talk about framework regarding HWTS. The draft policy has been revised and HWTS are yet to be part of national policy framework. This is right time to incorporate and highlight the concerns with possible solution in front of policy makers, would facilitate the process forward.

It takes enormous effort to promote/sensitize various stakeholders (Government, Institutions, NGOs, CBOs, Women, Youth and Children, Etc.) to be part and strengthen the system in all concerns to decrease infections and mortality rate. Communities should be sensitized and encouraged to adapt the method to treat the water as per local low cost method.

It is an effort to synthesis the experience and support the contribution of government and other stakeholders to involve in this process of developing a concrete policy framework to ensure safe drinking water supply to the citizens.

In the above context, we are proposing to organize one day workshop to discuss and document how to strengthen the ways to promote Household Water Treatment System through drafted policy on water and sanitation.

For further details

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