

# 'Water'shed policy to save valued resource

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Bangalore:** To sustain water assets in Karnataka's rural areas, the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) department will draw up a new policy shortly.

The policy, Operations and Maintenance of Water Assets, will encourage community participation. This will be in contrast to the present system where the state allots a measly sum for village panchayats to conserve water.

RDPR principal secretary K Jairaj on Friday announced the policy will be implemented from April. He was speaking at the launch of a water portal in Kannada, launched by India Water Portal and Arghyam. Nearly 25% of

borewells or piped water facilities are defunct in 56,000 habitations in the state, said Jairaj. "Maintenance of the assets and proper utilization of water is important. If safe drinking water is being provided and the mode of distribution is of poor quality, it serves little purpose," he added.

The new policy aims to empower chiefs of gram panchayats to distribute water, maintain borewells and recover charges from the users directly. Self-Help Groups in each GP will assist in collecting maintenance charges. For the first time in rural areas, the water supplied will be monitored using meters.

Currently, the state pays the panchayats an annual



RDPR principal secretary K Jairaj (right) launches the portal on Friday. Arghyam chairperson Rohini Nilekani (centre) looks on

Chethan Shivakumar

sum of Rs 8,000 for operation and maintenance of piped water, Rs 3,500 for minor irrigation schemes and Rs 600 for borewells. This policy hasn't achieved the desired result in many villages.

RDPR has welcomed social audits from NGOs regarding provision of water and sanitation facilities in all state schools before March this year, said Jairaj.

## Water scarcity

The RDPR has identified 4,000 habitations in Bidar, Bijapur, Koppal, Haveri, Chickballapur and Tumkur, which have below 40 lpcd (litres per capita). "This shortage will be met by providing water tankers, installation of borewells or deepening of existing

borewells," he added. The India Water Portal was launched on January 12, 2007, by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. A year later, the Kannada website was launched. The site provides water-related information and users' questions are answered by experts who have a tie-up with Arghyam.

The portal has Met data, a children's section, e-learning courses, and tools and techniques on water management. Arghyam chairperson Rohini Nilekani said similar portals will be launched in other languages to disseminate information. "However, a problem we faced while preparing content for the portal is the lack of information available from the government," she said.

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