

## *A Brief Report of the Consultation on Municipal Water Supply*

### *in Madhya Pradesh in Itarsi, 3rd February 2015*

Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, Badwani and Upbhokta Sanrakshan Manch, Itarsi organised a consultation in Itarsi on 3rd February 2015 to discuss on varied aspects of the municipal water supply scenario in the Madhya Pradesh. The consultation looked to discuss issues around municipal water services, local water resources and rivers including the new water supply project in Itarsi under Urban Infrastructure Development Scheme in Small and Medium Towns (UIDSSMT). Around 80 participants from the local community in and around Itarsi participated in the consultation including representatives of local volunteer and grassroots organisations, academics, senior citizens, women's groups, journalists among others. The meeting was addressed by representatives of various social organisations working on different issues including water from places such as Khandwa, Bhopal, Pipariya, Hoshangabad and Shivpuri.



Briefly, the new water supply project implemented in Itarsi (population - 1 lakh approx.) under UIDSSMT and proposes to draw bulk water from river Narmada, 13 kms away, has been under construction since October 2009. When the contract was signed the construction phase of the project was supposed to be completed in one and a half years, however since then 5 years have passed but the construction phase is not complete as yet. The existing water supply system in Itarsi draws water from borewells. It has also been observed that due to issues plaguing distribution water supply is inequitable in the town but largely water availability is not a major issue. The new project has been promoted while claiming that the existing system is very old and lack of maintenance has rendered it ineffective. However, it appears that due to lack of administrative and political vision the new project is being delayed. Technical and practical aspects are being neglected and have raised concerns on the pace and quality of construction. The domestic water tariff increase is also proposed to be tabled during the upcoming budget session in the municipal assembly.

During the introduction session Prof. Kashmir Singh Uppal, retired Principal Mahatma Gandhi Government PG College, Itarsi, shared the context of the consultation with the participants. He said that



right to water is a fundamental right enshrined in the constitution of India. However, through various reform schemes there are efforts to deny this right to local people. He said that private companies are looking to generate profits from the essential services like water and people need to be aware about these efforts.

Shri Yogesh Diwan, in his address stated that in the long term it is necessary for municipal water

supplies to assess the reliability of surface water sources in the context of increasing pollution levels as well as decreasing water availability. He said that in the context of Madhya Pradesh several industrial and

municipal water supply schemes are being proposed to supply raw water from Narmada River based on old estimated river flows. He said however, over a period of time the overall river flows have decreased and the pollution load has also increased in the waters. He stated that several schemes being planned for urban water supply do not take into account the needs of the local people. He called upon the local communities to understand the motives behind such schemes and requested that they campaign to make them pro-poor and pro-marginalised.



Shri Rehmat of Manthan Adhyayan

Kendra stated that for the proposed water supply scheme in Itarsi, the tender for the construction work was awarded at Rs 26.11 crores even though the approved cost of the project was Rs 13.81 crores. In the mean while the time limit of the tender expired and financial arrangement for the difference amount could not be reached by both the parties. The dispute in this matter between the private company and the municipal body has now reached the Madhya Pradesh High Court and is sub-judice. The works on the scheme began much later but kept lagging due to inordinate delays. The construction was planned to be completed in 1.5 years but during that period only 20% work was done. The private company has been given extensions 4 times but it is difficult to predict when the works would finish. The construction work mainly focuses on bulk water supply as compared to improvements in distribution to remove the intra-city inequalities. It appears that project benefits would not reach to the poor and slum communities which remain disconnected from the piped water supply services.

Shri Gaurav Dwivedi of Manthan Adhyayan Kendra shared about the conditionalities in the UIDSSMT scheme that the municipal bodies like Itarsi have to agree and sign to be eligible to receive the grants for infrastructure development from the central and state governments. The funds are tied and are supposed to be spent as per the procedures prescribed in the scheme. According to the reforms agenda of UIDSSMT municipal bodies have to agree to implement private participation in urban services like water and sanitation, full cost recovery, increasing user charges and removal of public stand posts. These conditionalities can have severe impacts on the poor and marginalised communities in accessing



domestic water. He also shared that in response to private participation various municipal bodies across the world are now rejecting handing over control of water services to private companies and asserting their own role in providing basic services to the local people - a process also known as remunicipalisation.

Shri Tarun Mandloi from Khandwa shared about the campaign in Khandwa on the private domestic water supply project in the town. He also shared about the impacts that the local people have been

observing due to the implementation of the private project in the town including increasing water charges, private control over water supply and prohibition on using local resources like dugwells, borewells and handpumps. Shri Manoj Bhadoria from Shivpuri shared similar experiences about the implementation of private domestic water project in Shivpuri. He stated that the project has been delayed by more than 3 years and people have been waiting for the project to start delivering water services. He also shared that most people do not know about the conditions included in the concession contract that has been signed with the private company similar to those in Khandwa. Incidentally, same company that is implementing the project in Shivpuri is also implementing it in Itarsi, namely Doshion Ltd.



During the open discussion session local people shared their views on the new scheme and the private project. Several of them stated that they were unaware of the projects details and the conditions that would be imposed because of it. They expressed their serious concerns about the terms and conditions under the project and also about these not kept in the public domain and shared with the local people. It needs to be mentioned that some of the important decisions about the project were not shared with the local people as well as the elected people's representatives. These decisions were taken in the Mayoral Council and not in the general assembly of the municipal body.



Local people participating in the discussion said that the burden of various local development schemes is borne by them, hence their participation in decision making and monitoring of such larger public welfare schemes is essential. They also agreed to form a local committee to spread awareness and discuss about the private water supply project in Itarsi. Shri Rajkumar Dubey of

Upbhokta Sanrakshan Manch, Itarsi said that they will request all the citizen groups in the town and well known people to join the committee. The consultation ended with the vote of thanks by Shri BB Gandhi.