

CHAPTER XIII : MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Department of Drinking Water Supply

13.1 Non-establishment of Central Water Testing Laboratory for Arsenic

Lack of monitoring of the project of setting up of Central Water Testing Laboratory for Arsenic at Kolkata resulted in the Laboratory not being set up even after eight years of releasing a grant of Rs. 50.32 lakh to the State Government.

Arsenic contamination of ground water in several districts of West Bengal had proved to be a major health hazard affecting a large segment of rural population. To accelerate the pace of testing of ground water and also to help arsenic mitigation activities in the State, the Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development, Department of Drinking Water Supply approved a research & development project “Setting up of Central Water Testing Laboratory for Arsenic at Kolkata” at an estimated cost of Rs. 62.91 lakh to be completed in one year. The technical approval was issued in January 1999.

In February 1999, the Department released grants-in-aid of Rs. 50.32 lakh towards the first instalment of the project to the State Public Health Engineering Department, Government of West Bengal. As per the terms and conditions of the grant, the organisation was required to refund the entire amount of grant-in-aid if it was not in a position to execute or complete the project.

Audit scrutiny in April 2007 revealed that the State department neither set up Central Water Testing laboratory for arsenic nor refunded the grant of Rs. 50.32 lakh, which remained completely unutilised as of June 2007.

This was indicative of poor internal control and monitoring on the part of the Ministry which could neither ensure execution of the project nor effect recovery of the amount of the grant.

The matter was referred to the Ministry in May 2007. While accepting the audit observation, the Ministry stated (October 2007) that the amount of Rs. 50.32 lakh would be deducted from the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP) funds to be released to the Government of West Bengal.