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75% of rural houses covered by Jal Jeevan

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NEW DELHI: The Modi government's flagship drinking water programme, Jal Jeevan Mission, has crossed a key milestone, reaching three-fourths of all rural households it intends to cover by 2024-end. However, progress continues to be varied across states, official data show.

As on date, nearly 145 million rural households, or 75% of the total, have been fitted with a functional tap water under the scheme. So far, 11 states and Union territories have achieved their target of 100% coverage ahead of the year-end deadline (Goa, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Gujarat, Haryana, Telangana, Puducherry, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram).

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the programme in August 2019, only one-sixth of India's roughly 192 million households across 600,000 villages had a functional water tap.

Getting to a water source is a long haul in most of rural India. According to a 2013 National Sample Survey Organisation survey, in Jharkhand, it took women 40 minutes one way, without considering the waiting time. In Bihar, it was 33 minutes and in Uttar Pradesh, 38 minutes. The water mission aims to change this drudgery.

Overall, the pace of implementation appears robust. A calculation by the Jal Shakti ministry showed that, on average, more than 85,000 rural families are being covered each day.

Yet, states where progress has been significantly behind the national average include Madhya

Pradesh (60.94%), Kerala (52.37%), Jharkhand (51.38%), Rajasthan (47.15%) and West Bengal (45.76), according to latest data on the mission's dashboard.

The Jal Jeevan Mission is an undertaking that requires laying pipelines, building village tanks and connecting them to a sustainable water source, some of which are located in the country's remotest corners, posing significant engineering challenges.

Under the mission, 30% weightage is assigned for difficult terrains and 10% weightage is assigned for population residing in SC/ST dominated areas while allocating the funds to prioritize coverage in these areas.

"To support long-term sustainability, local communities are mobilized with knowledge and skills to take ownership of the water connections in their villa-

ges," an official aware of the matter said.

In a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha on February 8 this year, minister of state for Jal Shakti, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, said uneven terrain, and scattered habitations were some of the hurdles being faced by some states.

Another key reason for slow progress in some states is a delay in the release of states' share towards implementing the scheme, he stated.

"The crux of the matter is the issue of sustainability. While connecting households with a water source is the easier part, past experience has shown that maintaining sustainability of the source is critical for longer-term availability of water," said Ram Moria of Samaj Pragati Sahayog, a water conservation NGO based in Devas, Madhya Pradesh.

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Portal for water level in dams, canals launched in Rajasthan

A dedicated portal launched in Jaipur last week will provide real time information on the water level in dams and reservoirs and the quantity of water available in canals in different parts of Rajasthan. The portal is expected to help in an efficient water management and facilitate prediction of floods and drought. Water Resources Minister Suresh Singh Rawat said while launching the portal that Rajasthan was the first State to develop a system which would bring the information on the availability of water in the public domain. “This is going to be a milestone in the water and disaster management in the State,” Mr. Rawat said.