Rishabh Sethi
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In this interview with EverythingAboutWater, **Rishabh Sethi** has shared his views on current scenario of Indian Water Sector and has also given us a glimpse of SPML's journey in the industry. Furthermore he talked about the future of water sector in country. Excerpts…

SMART SOLUTIONS WILL BE IN DEMAND TO MAKE SERVICES SMART AND EFFICIENT

Q Tell us a little bit about how far and wide SPML currently operates, with possibly a few examples of what is being done in different regions?

SPML Infra has been in the water business for more than three decades now and during the period we have executed some mark projects in the country. Today, we have projects in almost all big states of India. In Madhya Pradesh, we are developing a Smart City, "Vikram Udyogpuri" that will have 24X7 water supply system, complete sewerage network, storm water drainage system, solid waste management system, internal and external roads of 4 and 6 lanes, power transmission and distribution system, domestic gas distribution system, street lighting, CCTV and SCADA system, safety and security system, information and communication technology (ICT) network. This is first of its kind of a smart city which will have all smart utilities connected with technology for seamless services.

Among water supply projects, SPML is executing important ADB funded 24X7 Urban Water Supply projects in Karnataka in 6 cities: Bellary, Raichur, Haveri, Hospet, Gadag-Betageri, and Sindhanur to serve about 1.3 million populations. In Rajasthan, SPML's Pokhran water supply project aims to provide sustainable source of clean drinking water to over 1.2 million residents of 580 villages and 4 towns of Pokhran, Falsoond, Balotra, Siwana, along with industries and defence forces. Then we have a number of other water supply projects under various stages of execution in different cities of Rajasthan.

In Delhi, SPML is executing urban water supply project for improvement in water distribution networks in Mehrauli and Vasant Vihar and adjoining areas that involves construction, rehabilitation and development of water distribution network to serve almost a million populations. This is apart from installation of 200,000 AMR water meter that SPML is going to complete soon.

In Gujarat, SPML is executing a number of water projects including water supply to Bhavnagar. This project is part of Saurashtra-Narmada Avtaran Irrigation Yojana (Sauni Yojana) that has been initiated by the government of Gujarat to divert excess over flowing flood water of Narmada River to allocated Saurashtra region. SPML is also executing several water transmission and distribution projects under Swarnim Gujarat bulk pipeline project.

In Uttar Pradesh, SPML is executing water supply project in Agra and sewerage network and wastewater treatment project in Kanpur apart from several power transmission and distribution projects in different cities.

In Maharashtra, SPML is executing two important water supply and distribution projects in Aurangabad and Bhiwandi apart from decentralized sewerage network in Mira Bhayander and sewage treatment project in Nasik.

SPML also has good presence in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Goa, Uttrakhand and West Bengal apart from North Eastern States.

Q At a high level, how would you describe SPML's core focus and capabilities?

SPML continues its dedication towards sustainable water management solutions. With the passage of time, this task is becoming important and urgent as water sources continuously depleting against ever increasing demands. In its 36 years of existence in India, the company has acquired a thorough understanding of water and wastewater sector which are also our focus areas. With a number of water projects in different states, SPML today provides drinking water facilities to almost 40 million people. The company's extensive experience and knowledge of the water sector has led it to be among the top water management companies in the country and only Indian company in the list of World's top 40 private water and wastewater companies.

Q What were the achievements of SPML in the year 2015-16? How has the company grown?

The year was relatively good for us. We received new order of Smart City development in Madhya Pradesh, and new orders for water supply from Govt. of Rajasthan and Telangana. During the year we completed and commissioned a number of important

125 MLD Water Treatment Plant at Pokhran

water projects in several states. We also received a number of coveted awards for our indigenously developed Integrated Management Information System (IMIS), software solution for smart management of utilities, a highly scalable system capable of handling the metering, billing, customer relationship management, network analysis, demand forecasting and management, asset and inventory management, business intelligence, and operation and maintenance of the entire network. After implementing this system, the water loss has been considerably reduced and revenue increased significantly with better consumer services in water utilities in Delhi and Karnataka. In going forward with Smart City development, the IMIS will be immensely helpful for water utilities to reduce water losses (non-revenue water), improve consumer services, keeping track of all assets and increase revenue. During the year we also improved on our revenue position and received some long pending dues from of our valuable clients.

Q Water remains a political issue. What is your experience so far with the water projects?

Water is politically motivated at all levels, be it local, regional, national or a global. The threat of conflicts on water is always there at international level and among states within the country. SPML has been in the water business for a very long time now and have already executed a large number of water projects in the country. SPML also championed the concept of 'Design Build Operate' mode of projects in the water sector. With its several completed and ongoing projects, SPML has the experience of laying more than 10,000 km of water supply pipeline upto 4000 mm diameters in different regions. A number of water treatment plants, pumping stations, reservoirs and other infrastructure for water supply and distribution management has already been completed that has helped in providing millions of people with drinking water facilities. Our experience in Indian water sector has been rich and encouraging and we have contributed immensely towards conserving the precious resources across the nation by reducing wastage, losses and pilferages with the use of modern technology.

Q How do you see the water sector, compared with other sectors from an investor viewpoint?

Indian water sector is certainly going to witness tremendous growth with the current government's focus on infrastructure development. As per an estimate, water and wastewater market in India will grow at a CAGR of 18-20 percent. But as compared to other sectors, a lot of development needs to be done in water sector. There is no regulatory authority in water sector for dispute resolution as compared to power. We have to develop model concession agreements in comparison to the other sectors which are clear to both the clients and developers and the financial institutions are familiar with the terms and conditions. The new concepts of hybrid annuity model as prevalent in road sector will be tested based on public private partnership (PPP) model under the Ganga cleaning program to reform the wastewater sector in India. With a number of new schemes and the serious business environment being developed in India, the water sector is certain to develop as other infrastructure sectors in the country.

Q In your opinion, what are the 'Opportunities for Water Companies' in Indian Water Sector right now?

The government has initiated several programs that will boost the infrastructure development in water sector in India. The ambitious 100 Smart City development, the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) scheme for development of infrastructure for drinking water, sanitation, and transport in 500 towns and cities and National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) along with other water supply projects with dedicated budgets will contribute to the growth. These initiatives along with determined plan to make the policy favorable and ease of doing business with a number of reforms undertaken and planned for future are the steps taken by the government in the right direction.

Q Are there still gaps between what water utilities need and what current technologies are providing? Where do you see the biggest opportunities for technology and solution providers?

The major challenge for water utilities is their ageing infrastructure and high levels of water loss (NRW: non-revenue water) from their distribution system due to physical losses (leaking pipes) and commercial losses (water theft or lack of proper billing). High NRW levels lead to increased operating costs, reduced revenues and poor utility performance and they also impact customer service levels and the utilities' ability to expand service coverage.

This is an age of smart technology and the same is applied in water management also.

Today we need smart treatment system for treating water for drinking purposes, smart distribution system with minimum or negligible water loss during transmission, smart supply management system, smart metering and billing and effective consumer management system for informed consumers. The Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) also known as smart meters are modern digital versions of the utility meters. These meters works on advance communication technology of automatically collecting consumption, diagnostic and status data from meters and transferring that data to a central database for analyzing, troubleshooting and billing thus saving utility providers the expense of periodic trips to each physical location to read a meter. SPML is executing the largest AMR metering projects in India to install over 500,000 AMR water meters in different states.

SPML has also executed an AMI pilot project in Delhi which is an integrated system of smart meters, communications networks, and data management systems that enables two-way communication between utilities and customers in smart management of water supply and distribution network. The project has helped DJB to manage many critical challenges and decrease operating costs, identify performance issues, improve customer service and better prioritize infrastructure investments. These technology and smart solution will be in demand from water utilities to make the services smart and efficient in the years to come.

Q From geographical point of view, where do you see more growth happening to SPML? Which are the state governments on the municipal side who are more pro-active?

Water is a state subject and every state has its own policy related to water. In Delhi we have water projects with complete revamp of infrastructure as well as retrofitting and refurbishment depending upon the requirements. Karnataka, with the help of ADB funding has gone to replace their 100 percent pipeline and meters and already started a number of 24x7 water projects

13 MLD Sewage Treatment Plant in Zone 6 in Mira Bhayander

in many of their towns out of which SPML is executing the project in 6 cities. In Rajasthan, we are developing a number of water supply infrastructure projects and recently received orders for wastewater treatment project and sewerage network in 11 cities where treated water will be reused and the saved fresh water can be supplied to the towns as drinking water. Other states are mulling for integrated projects wherein the drinking water supply and sewage treatment will be clubbed together and be given to one company for effective services. All the large states and leading municipalities will be taking water related initiatives with the funds available to them under various schemes. Even the smaller municipalities will be getting funds for such projects under AMRUT schemes and there will be renewed emphasis on infrastructure development for water and wastewater in smaller cities and towns as well. Given the current scenario, SPML is focusing on water and wastewater projects under smart city and AMRUT schemes from almost all states and municipalities.

Q What would be the three most important issues in the water industry within the next 5 years?

With rapidly changing urban face of India and increasing demand for more water and better services from utilities, the most important issues that utilities will be facing are - providing continuous supply of quality water to all residents, dealing effectively with wastewater with complete treatment and reuse and responding to customer needs in terms of expectations and availability.

Q What are some of your goals over the next year, and the next five years?

SPML brand is quite strong in the Indian water market, and the company continues to enhance its presence in new areas. Presently, SPML is executing a number of projects for water supply, wastewater treatment, sewerage network, power transmission and distribution, and municipal solid waste management and we have plans to expedite the execution to complete most of near completion projects within this year. SPML will be pursuing projects in the smart city development space, water supply, wastewater treatment and decentralized sewerage network space along with integrated city distribution and long term operation and maintenance contracts.

Q Your 'message' for our readers...

Water is no doubt very important for human habitats but we must give equal importance to wastewater treatment and reuse as almost 80 percent of supplied water is discharged as wastewater. Discharge of wastewater without treatment contaminates our fresh water sources, polluting the environment and causes disease. For water sustainability, all wastewater should be treated with the modern treatment technology and reused wherever possible to reduce our fresh water footprints. ☞ **www.spml.co.in**