

A portrait of Mr. Subhash Sethi, Chairman of SPML Infra Limited. He is a middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing black-rimmed glasses, a white shirt, a blue tie, and a blue suit jacket. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a textured, warm-toned wall.

INTERVIEW WITH
Mr. SUBHASH SETHI,
Chairman,
SPML Infra Limited

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THE WATER CONUNDRUM

Q. SPML Infra is amongst the water companies that feature into World's Top 50 Private Water Companies. What are the good practices and strategies that SPML Infra has adopted to be in the list?

A. SPML Infra consistently features among the World's Top 50 Private Water Companies as per Global Water Intelligence, London. The vision for growth is driven by operational compliance, service quality, efficient project execution and continuous business process improvements. SPML strives towards excellence in all operations through compliance with world-class quality systems in its specific fields of activities, ensuring a continuous improvement in project execution and quality management. SPML has also been gaining an edge by devising and adopting new technologies essential for growth. Water have become the most talked about and very concerning subject now, but we started thinking and working on water issues when nobody else was talking about it more than 40 years ago. With our sheer commitment and hard work, today we are happy that we have created a huge difference in providing drinking water facilities to the most needy and vulnerable section of the society. We are providing drinking water facilities to more than 50 million people currently across several states in India through our various completed projects.

SPML continues its dedication to promote sustainable water management solutions, a task that is increasingly becoming essential and complex as the supply-demand management is plagued by water source depletion and water scarcity. In its 40 years of existence in India, the company has acquired a thorough understanding

of water and wastewater sector. 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 the first Indian company being featured in the list of World's Top 50 Private Water Companies.

Q. What do you think about Jal Jeevan Mission and how your company is contributing in rural water supply scheme?

A. Jal Jeevan Mission, the flagship program of Govt. of India is launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India for providing safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections to all households in India by year 2024. This is one of the largest rural water supply schemes in India so far in terms of investment and scope with an allocation of Rs. 3.6 Lac Crore (3.6 trillion) budget. The government is seriously taking up the cause of water through Jal Jeevan Mission to provide 55 LPCD of clean drinking water to every individual in the country at a time when hundreds of millions don't have access to clean water.

This scheme will implement the water source sustainability measures in villages as mandatory elements, such as recharge and reuse through grey water management, water conservation, rain water harvesting and other measures. The Jal Jeevan Mission will be based on a community driven approach for water infrastructure development and operation & maintenance with information, education and communication as the key component. The mission of this scheme is to create a jan andolan (people's movement) for water, thereby making it everyone's priority.

According to the Ministry of Jal Shakti, the Jal Jeevan Mission will create a smart rural water supply eco-system to measure and monitor the service delivery of water supply in rural areas.

SPML is a flag bearer in terms of rural water supply projects that has been completed and in different stages of execution under Jal Jeevan Mission. Recently we have completed drinking water supply project in Manipur in a record time of 18 months as against the project duration of 24 months despite being a challenging task due to hilly areas and high intensity of rainfall. We are also executing several such projects in Manipur apart from Uttar Pradesh and other states. With the knowledge and relevant experience, SPML is ready to work with the Ministry of Jal Shakti and state governments in taking up the projects under this scheme and completing them within the stipulated time to achieve the target set by our Hon'ble Prime Minister.

Q. What are the challenges and opportunities that you foresee for water management from Jal Jeevan Mission, Smart Cities, and National Mission for Clean Ganga, Water Supply and Water Distribution Management and Wastewater Treatment?

A. India is amongst the largest water markets in

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Versatile industry experience in water and wastewater segment, SPML is strategically positioned and equipped with the right capabilities to continue its growth in the market.

the world which presents numerous opportunities for water infrastructure development projects. The government's vision of not only building basic water and sanitation infrastructure but to build smart infrastructure with futuristic goals are fueling the sectorial growth more than ever. The largest rural water supply project under Jal Jeevan

Mission will be a game changer for the water sector in India. Considering versatile industry experience spanning about four decades in water and wastewater segment, SPML is strategically positioned and equipped with the right capabilities to continue its growth in the market.

Funding from central and state governments and resource generation from local bodies will help in the development of water and wastewater sector in India. The coordination between different local bodies for an integrated approach will be important. The understanding of the concepts of new development, retrofitting and redevelopment by the policy makers, implementers and other stakeholders at different levels will be factors determining the success.

So far the challenges are concerned; the foremost challenge for Jal Jeevan Mission is to complete

the water supply through household functional tap connection to the remaining about 135 million households in the geographical spread of the country in next 4 years' time. Even in other projects like Smart Cities development, NMCG and others; strong political support, transparent policies and regulations, adequate financial support and immediate solutions for issues will help overcome the challenges. The opportunities are immense; if the following steps are implemented in letter and spirit:

- ▶▶ Sequential clearances at various levels of government, especially land and environmental related matters need urgent attention and close coordination among all levels of government and appropriate delegation for quick decision making
- ▶▶ Revision of total project cost when the project gets delayed, if the project cost is not revised then the investor should be entitled



to recover his dues

- ▶ Proper and time bound dispute resolution mechanism and swift payment for any arbitration awards on the basis of merits
- ▶ Appropriate structuring of the projects, particularly of demarcation of risks and rewards between government and private sector
- ▶ Adoption of innovative technologies, strategies, global best practices and newer business models
- ▶ Incentive for before time completion of projects and better performance project based on power and land utilization etc.

Q. SPML Infra has emerged as leading players in the highly fragmented Indian water and wastewater market, how do you manage to tackle and overcome competitions?

A. The Indian water sector is fragmented with numerous EPC and project management companies of varied sizes and capabilities. Among the leading companies, SPML has been steadily increasing its market share with expertise and legacy of implementing over 600 world-class infrastructure projects for water supply and distribution management, wastewater management, environment and power projects.

As part of our strategy, we put dedicated efforts to complete all projects by implementing technologically advanced systems and processes, deploying modern and better equipment, well qualified team with experienced engineers, reducing cost on overheads, accurate and faster procurement of materials, and integration of

several key departments. We did face challenges in execution, but due to our vast experience and good coordination between client, contractor and suppliers, we minimise the cost overrun and schedule delays. We act quickly on problems, drive for results, and ensure detailed follow-up to meet our commitments.

Q. What all projects in water that you have taken up recently? Would you please share the details with us?

A. As a brand, SPML is quite strong in the Indian water market and the company continues to enhance its presence in new areas with having the trust of both clients and stakeholders. Presently, SPML is executing a number of projects for water supply and management, wastewater treatment, sewerage network, power transmission and distribution, and municipal solid waste management.

In each of its chosen areas, SPML has its stamp on numerous completed and ongoing projects. In the area of sustainable water management, SPML is currently engaged in Phase III of the Saurashtra-Narmada Avtaran Irrigation Project (SAUNI Yojana), the ambitious large water supply and irrigation project envisage to provide drinking water facilities to around 39 million people across 132 towns and 11,456 villages and to irrigate 1.8 million hectare of land in Saurashtra, Kutch and north Gujarat benefiting millions of farmers. SPML has earlier completed the Phase I and Phase II of this project which was inaugurated by Hon'ble Prime Minister of India in April 2017 and March 2019 respectively.

The company is also working on urban water

supply projects, including one aimed at improving the water distribution network in Delhi; six urban water supply projects in Karnataka that would serve almost two million people. The water supply augmentation project in Bengaluru to reduce non-revenue water has helped in significantly reducing water losses from 56% to 27%, thus saving of 40 million liters' potable water per day. The saved water is being used to provide drinking water facilities to 110 extended colonies of Bengaluru.

Another remarkable project under Cauvery Water Supply Scheme, Stage V in Bengaluru which the company is executing with laying of 3000 mm diameters pipeline for clear water transmission mains aims to supply an additional 775 MLD of water to Bengaluru city. Apart from these projects, SPML is also executing a number of rural water supply projects under the Jal Jeevan Mission in several states of the country.

About the Author

Mr. Subhash Sethi is Chairman of SPML Infra Limited. Under his leadership, SPML Infra went on to establish itself as the leader in water domain and developed sustainable infrastructure to help water utilities to deliver safe and clean drinking water to over 50 million people in India. He has been bestowed with several prestigious awards including Economic Times Global Asian Business Leader for his valuable contributions.

To know more about the author and contributor, you can write to us. Your feedback is welcome and should be sent at: content@eawater.com.