

RURAL ELECTRIFICATION, INCLUDING DISTRIBUTION OF ELECTRICITY

(Item No. 14)

Rural electrification includes (i) electricity supply to all villages, (ii) energisation of pumpsets, (iii) Street lighting and (iv) energy conservation besides prevention of pilferage. As on 31.03.1995 all towns (439) and all habited villages (15822) and 99.89% of hamlets (47794 out of 47845) have been electrified. Tamil Nadu stands well ahead of many states and also of all India average (85% coverage). All Adi Dravidar colonies (26713) have been electrified. Further 10.92 lakhs huts have been electrified. 14.88 lakhs agricultural pumpsets have been energised. As on 1.4.95, 467561 applications for energisation of pumpsets were pending with Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB). Backlog is heavy due to limited power availability and TNEB is providing connection to about 40000 pumpsets per annum.

02. Out of 1166157 (as on 1.4.95) streetlights, village panchayats have 910730 (as on 1.4.96). There are 832557 tubelights, 36545 bulbs, 4197 sodium vapour and 2926 mercury vapour lamps. In order to save electricity Government have decided that all bulbs should be converted into tube lights. Director of Rural Development has identified 7047 financial weaker village panchayats where revenue of the panchayat is less than Rs.20/- percapita. (3452 panchayats with less than Rs.10/- and 3590 panchayats with less than Rs 20/-). There are 341426 street lights in these weaker village panchayats. As per section 110, of Tamil Nadu Panchayat Act, 1994, lighting of public roads and public places in built up areas is one of the obligatory functions of the panchayats. Thus, it is expected that the village panchayats should meet the maintenance cost of street lights from out of its own funds. However, every year the State Government releases street light grants to meet the expenses of current consumption charges for street lights and purchase of street light materials for weaker village panchayats. 1996-97 budget provision for such grant is Rs.3 crores.

03. From 1970-71, Rural Electrification Corporation has been financing TNEB for specific purposes (Village and Adi Dravidar Colonies electrification, pumpset energisation, etc.). Upto 31.3.95, Rs.412.02 crores of loan by REC and Rs.324.40 crores of loan by Banks have been released to finance 2083 rural electrification schemes.

04. Tamil Nadu has a wide net work of electricity distribution for variety of uses extending upto the remote villages. Power pilferage and theft have become widespread practice and are being basically detected by the TNEB staff. It is entirely left to the TNEB staff to detect such pilferages, without any aim of the local communities. Further fresh power connections including poles, transformers etc. are hitherto being decided by TNEB. With the emergence of Panchayat Raj Institutions, TNEB could be in a position to take help of the village panchayats and Panchayat Unions, to identify the new locations for transformers and poles. The situation suggests room for a constructive working relationship between the Electricity Board and the Panchayats for mutual advantage. Panchayat Union Councils will have the review powers to monitor all economic development and welfare schemes implemented by TNEB; and District Panchayat will exercise the advisory role for both Government and TNEB on the district level energy planning.

05. In the above backdrop, the following functions are recommended to be entrusted to the rural local bodies:-

I. VILLAGE PANCHAYATS

<i>ACTIVITY</i> (1)	<i>ENTRUSTMENT OF POWERS</i> (2)
1. Operation and Maintenance of street lights.	i) Procure and supply equipments and fittings (bulbs/tubes) and undertake the street light maintenance.
2. Monitoring power supply.	i) Reporting power supply position during prime crop season.

II. PANCHAYAT UNION

<i>ACTIVITY</i> (1)	<i>ENTRUSTMENT OF POWERS</i> (2)
1. Review and Monitoring of power supply.	i) Monitor and review all Government and TNEB schemes implemented in Panchayat Union area viz. power supply to agriculture, energisation of pumpsets, power connection to Adi Dravidar colonies, hut connection and

III. DISTRICT PANCHAYAT

<i>ACTIVITY</i> (1)	<i>ENTRUSTMENT OF POWERS</i> (2)
1. Monitoring and Review of power supply.	i) Review all Government schemes more specifically energisation of agricultural pumpsets (quantitative and qualitative), hut connection scheme, and electrification of Adi Dravidar colonies and any other scheme for the economic development and welfare of the people of the district implemented by TNEB. Superintending Engineers should attend such reviews and be accountable to the District Panchayat.

Implications

06. Non-availability of line man for street light replacement in time has been major problem in the street light maintenance. TNEB in consultation with Panchayat Union and Village Panchayat is undertaking such maintenance. However, the materials for replacement are supplied by the village panchayat.

07. The Government policy is to provide lighting to all areas and also replace all bulbs into four feet tube lights. The village panchayats have been entrusted with the duty under the Act to operate and maintain street lights. Village Panchayats are to meet expenditure on three counts (i) Electricity consumption charges on street lights, (ii) Electricity consumption charges on water supply and (iii), Maintenance of street lights. Both village panchayats and Government should assume responsibilities.