INTERVIEW

Complete village electrification is a great national achievement

— Subhash Sethi, Chairman,
SPML Infra Ltd

SPML Infra is a multifarious infrastructure development company with diverse capabilities ranging from water management, wastewater handling, solid waste management, power T&D and civil infrastructure. In this exchange, we have **Subhash Sethi** expounding on the company's abilities and achievements in the village electrification space. Sethi also observes that thanks to the government's rigorous monitoring, most rural electrification are being completed within their cost and time estimates.

When did SPML Infra venture into village electrification? So far, how many village electrification projects has SPML completed, and what is the state-wise distribution of these villages?

SPML Infra started rural electrification project in 2004 and under Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) from April 2005. We have completed more than 20 rural electrification projects. We have also executed a number of projects under the Restructured Accelerated Power Development and Reforms Programme (R-APDRP) and several transmission & distribution projects that has also helped in augmenting rural electrification in India.

VILLAGE ELECTRIFICATION BY SPML INFRA

State	No. of villages	% share
Karnataka	9,041	44.6
Bihar	7,374	36.4
Odisha	1,558	7.7
Jharkhand	867	4.3
West Bengal	865	4.3
Uttar Pradesh	548	2.7
Total	**20,253**	**100.0**

Village electrification has been an ongoing activity in India. In particular, do you see any difference in the way village electrification is being handled by the current government (under the DDUGJY) and the previous UPA government (RGGVY)?

The Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) was started by the current government in July 2015 for rural electrification and the earlier scheme of Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) for village electrification by providing electricity distribution infrastructure in the rural areas has been subsumed in the DDUGJY scheme.

The present government is focused with their aim of all village electrification and sanctioned 921 projects to electrify 1,21,225 un-electrified villages, intensive electrification of 5,92,979 partially electrified villages and provide free electricity connections to 39.74 million BPL rural households under DDUGJY rural electrification scheme.

The Union Ministry of Power is

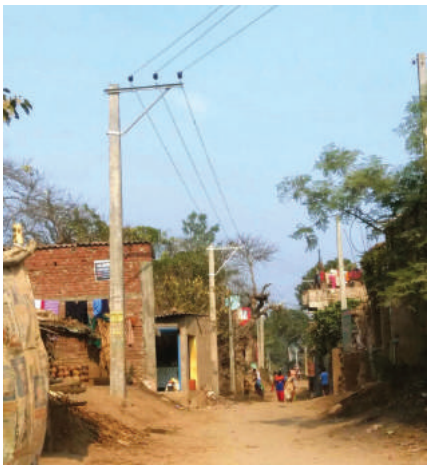
constantly reviewing the progress of these projects to implement 100 per cent electrification in rural India.

India achieved the 100 per cent village electrification mark (by definition) and managed to electrify 18,452 villages in less than 1,000 days (August 2015 to April 2018). What do you feel of this achievement?

It is certainly a great achievement of the government, with focused approach and determination; they achieved the difficult task to electrify 18,452 villages in less than 1,000 days. Yes, we were part of this achievement and SPML Infra has electrified around 4,000 villages in Patna and Gaya district in Bihar during the period. During this period, rural electrification were completed in a mission mode with regular progress review and easing on relevant issues like right of way. The dedicated dashboard of every day progress from across India on ministry website and specially created Grameen Vidyutikaran (GARV) App for monitoring the village and household electrification in the country which also provided interactive platform for feedback has helped in expediting electrification works.

What are the typical challenges that contractors face during village electrification projects?

There are several challenges being faced by the contractors while executing rural electrification projects. The key challenges among others are; right of way, transporting HT/LT line poles, machineries and mobilizing workforce from one place to another in the absence of proper motorable roads and resistance to erect electric pole on particular locations. It is labour-intensive work and getting trained labourers are difficult due to similar widespread works being carried out across the country.



> "Frequent review of village electrification projects by using modern technology services is necessary to monitor successful cases and to identify areas of improvement. Further, timely allocation of funds and utilization report can help expedite village electrification projects."

What broad measures would you suggest to expedite village electrification in India, especially in remote locations?

Because of the rigorous monitoring and management systems, most rural electrification projects are planned fairly and being executed within reasonable time and resources. Frequent review of village electrification projects by using modern technology services is necessary to monitor successful cases and identify areas of improvement. Timely allocation of funds and utilization report in conjunction with progress will help expedite village electrification. SPML Infra has adopted technologies and employed in-time planning, supply, execution and monitoring systems to keep tabs

on the progress of rural electrification and other power projects.

Is SPML Infra involved in household electrification under the "Saubhagya" scheme?

SPML Infra is currently not executing any specific project under Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (Saubhagya), however all BPL household connections under the rural electrification projects executed by SPML Infra are part of this scheme.

The government has targeted to achieve complete household electrification by April 2019 or so. What is your overall view?

It is possible with right approach and availability of proper infrastructure for reaching out to remote and difficult locations. The progress so far suggest that about 87 per cent of rural households have been electrified as on June 19, 2018, according to the real-time dashboard of Saubhagya scheme launched on September 25, 2017 to electrify all rural and urban households. About 7.3 million households were electrified in about nine months till June 19, 2018, since Saubhagya's launch. Government is putting their all efforts to expedite the rate of electrification to electrify the remaining 13 per cent households (29.5 million) and the target may be achieved by the stipulated time. ■