

Food for Chief Minister's and World Bank's th

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Srinagar, Jan 27: On a recent visit to Pulwama, chief minister, Mufti Muhammad Sayeed, expressed a lofty wish: expansion of the World Bank-aided Integrated Watershed Development Project (IWDP) in Kashmir.

Although the project has apparently yielded some positive results, an in-depth investigation into it reveals that much more needs to be done for the attainment of its objective - watershed people's capacity building and productivity, including watershed conservation and better water management.

Initially, in 1989, World Bank aided development of Doodhganga sub watershed in Kashmir. After the completion of the project in 1996, the

state government presented project proposals for the development of three more sub watersheds, namely Ramnagar, Akhnoor and Rambiar.

However, due to the intervention by the then forests minister, Chaudhary Muhammad Ramzan, Rajwar sub-watershed that fell in his constituency was also included in the Kashmir project as part of the World Bank's watershed development programme in India.

Due the disturbed conditions in the valley, the World Bank did not get involved directly in implementation and monitoring. Instead, the union ministry of agriculture has been made the nodal agency. The project costs is shared by the World Bank and the government of India on 50:50 basis.

The IWDP envisages development of horticulture, agriculture, forests, veterinary,

soil conservation, and roads in a sub watershed.

The J&K project faced trouble last year when the World Bank threatened withdrawal from the project because of serious cases of funds misuse and improper accounting.

The very choice of Rajwar area for development under IWDP has remained a contentious issue. Watershed experts

are of the view that from watershed development perspective, Rajwar area, being at the fag end of the valley, has not been the right choice. "There are numerous highly degraded sub watersheds in Badgam and Islamabad districts which should have been preferable choices", a watershed expert told *Greater Kashmir*. Development of areas of these two districts would

have a positive impact on the valley plains, facing problems of soil deposition and catchment degradation.

World Bank sources say that Rajwar's development is being reassessed. Incidentally, soon after the new government took over, an official associated with Rajwar project was placed un-

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der suspension for his "open support" of the election campaign of former minister, Chaudhary Muhammad Ramzan.

The construction of a guest house on the highway at Qazigund out of the Rambiar project funds by former minister, Ghulam Ahmed Shah, has also been seriously objected to by the World Bank.

The bank responded by taking stringent measures for ensuring transparency in funds utilization. Vouchers are now displayed on Internet for verification.

Besides, monitoring and supervision is also now being done by DHV Consultancy, Holland, Ministry of Agriculture, Gol and the Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow.

In its mid term review directions in May 2002, the World Bank has directed that there should be no work outside the sub watershed areas, the targets should not be overstepped, there should be no re-appropriation of funds, no disbursement of salary to the staff in excess of sanctioned strength, among many other things.

Watershed experts are of the

view that in conditions like that of Kashmir, watershed development is closely associated with better water management. Given the increasing depletion of water sources in Kashmir, especially in Kandi belts, focus should have been on innovative water resources management.

Much of the emphasis is on the watershed, while as its catchment does not catch much attention.

"Effects of treatment of catchment is directly on watershed. Conservation and development of the watershed has to be given due priority", says director, soil conservation, Muhammad Aslam Chisti.

For the 2002-03 fiscal, Rs 50 crore were earmarked for the IWDP project. Out of this, Rs 10 crore have remained unspent and were redirected by the government to departments coming under forest. Repeated attempts

World Bank's thought

nought

for over two months to get the comments of the IWDP Project Director in Jammu proved futile.

Although there has been enough room for use of the diverted amount in more areas of watershed, the same has not been possible due to a number of reasons, one being the overload of unprofessional staff in the project.

"Since the project has an integrated approach, most of its managers do not have an integrated know-how of the project", says a watershed expert at UNEP.

Although both in Rajwar and Rambhara the project has made some improvement in surface and spring water management, two important components for capacity building have been neglected.

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Watershed development models elsewhere show that in scarcity areas, rain or snow water harvesting has played a key role in rural upliftment. In Rajwar, although some rain water harvesting (RWH) structures have been desilted, there is no emphasis on their further development.

But some other water-related works are surely being done. Says Ghulam Hassan Ganai, Agriculture/Horticulture specialist (IWDP), "We have already built six mini dams in Rajwar."

Upto March 2002, 159 hand pumps and 56 wells were also constructed in Rajwar. In Rambhara, 62 village ponds, 63 water harvesting tanks, 49 storage tanks and 175 hand pumps/wells have been built during the period.

These water structures are mainly for drinking, livestock and horticultural pesticides use.

Surprisingly, the World Bank in its May 2002 mid-term review has directed the Kashmir branch of IWDP not to go for any engineering works in water harvesting structures, drainage line treatment and water supply schemes.

"Works like these cannot contribute in capacity building and productivity, which is our main focus", an official of the World Bank told *Greater Kashmir*.

Watershed development examples elsewhere show that in rain-fed areas like Rajwar and Rambhara, sprinkling and drip irrigation systems play a vital role in rural productivity.

"Vast tracts of wastelands and dry lands could be brought under commercial farming, for instance", says a UNEP expert.

Already, the horticulture and forest departments use sprinkle system for high-yield fruit and other crops in the valley.

No wonder, in water scarce Changthang area of

Ladakh, grassland development has been done by sprinkle irrigation system.

"The problem is that a feature of the IWDP is cost sharing between the project and the beneficiaries. Poor peasants cannot share the costs of expensive systems like sprinkle and drip", says Ghulam Mohiuddin, an official working at Rambhara. According to him, one kanal of land costs Rs 50,000 - Rs 60,000.

What is surprising is that the possibility of commercial exploitation of aromatic, medicinal or even saffron plants has not been assessed in the IWDP, Kashmir.

That could have been possible in case cost-effective rain and snow water harvesting techniques were popularized.

"Aerial seeding could have been an option. In that case we could have used land according to its capabilities" says G H Bhat, Distt. Soil Conservation Officer, Islamabad.

What is noticeable is that methods of land alteration have not been popularised. For example, use of unharmed chemicals for sealing soil porosity for useful water channeling has not been contemplated.

In fact, involvement of the Village Development Committees (VDCs) associated with IWDP could play a key role in that. However, most important of all would be involvement of professionally-trained NGOs in training and grassroots implementation.

"For capacity-building in these areas, we have to keep success examples of Gujarat and Rajasthan in sight" says Owais Masoodi, an engineer with Srinagar-based Himayat Trust, an organization well trained in rain and snow water harvesting.

In fact, if the project were to be expanded with a refined focus to other watersheds in Kashmir, results could be exciting.