

Water policy needs to induce efficiency

<http://www.businesseconomics.in/?p=537&pfstyle=wp>

January 17, 2011

Posted by [admin](#) on Dec 28, 2010 in [Environment](#) | [0 comments](#)

share

By Bappaditya Chatterjee

The Centre is formulating a revised National Water Policy (NWP) for which the Union Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR) held consultations with water experts and stakeholders. The government floated its first National Water Policy in 1987 and a revised version was made in 2002. But there are doubts over the approach of the government: whether it will reflect the importance of ecosystem and eco-hydrological updating of water policy or end up with traditional civil engineering oriented water management such as building up dams and embankments.

Prof. Jayanta Bandyopadhyay of IIM Calcutta, an invitee to the consultation meeting on reviewing water policy, stated, "To say the least, we do not have a policy that responds to the need of the hour. It is a problem of colonial history of water management in India that instead of interdisciplinary policy guiding the country and the government to appropriate choices of water engineering, traditional water engineers of the Ministry of Water Resources with their minds fixed on large scale structural interventions into water systems, are given the task of writing the National Water Policy."

Integrated management

Water management is fragmented and shared among several ministries with the task of irrigation entrusted to the MoWR, the task of pollution control to the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the task of providing safe drinking water to the Ministry of Rural Development or the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. The demand is for integrated management, not a differentiated one. The policy framework has to update itself periodically as water science progresses and suggest effective institutions for the allocation of water for diverse requirements based on updated technological choices.

Water policy needs knowledge of many other disciplines, for example, fisheries and aquatic biodiversity, ecological economics, anthropology, and many others. This is the task that needs professionals with high levels of interdisciplinary knowledge both in natural and social sciences.

National Water Policy (NWP) 2002

Achyut Das, Director of Agrabamee, an NGO, was invited by MoWR for consultation before enunciating NWP 2002 said, "NWP 2002 was not correct in many ways as it has talked of Basin Level Management where as it should have been at the level of micro-catchments



with emphasis on catch water where it falls. Ecology should have been given its due place and importance.”

Due to historical imperatives, Indian water management even today starts with a commitment to irrigation and that too, a very inefficient irrigation system. Prof. Bandyopadhyay stated, “In India, 85% of water supplied is for an irrigation system whose efficiency is about 35%. Policy needs to promote more efficient use of water but no one questions the farmers about this inefficiency. Unlike the more informed policies in many countries like those of EU, Australia, South Africa, etc. the basic goal of water management as expressed in the policy is not to sustain the ecological status of the water systems.” India that is the largest irrigated country in the world, ranks the lowest when it comes to access to safe drinking water with about 300 million people denied this.

Pricing for efficient water usage

Water policy must encourage efficient use of water. China faces similar problems of inefficient irrigation system but they have taken efficient irrigation as a major challenge. Israel has reached a level of irrigation efficiency more than 50%. This is because they maintain the economics of water while in India there is no valuation of water supplied. If water is scarce, it needs to be used efficiently. There has to be a price tag on it. However, drinking water for all or at nominal cost should be ensured before pricing is introduced.

Sustainable river management

Water science that addresses the specific hydro-meteorological conditions in India has to develop with an interdisciplinary eco-systemic perspective.

For example, traditional engineering rooted in the European knowledge base regards rising levels of rivers as an unexpected disaster. According to Prof. Bandyopadhyay, “An eco-systemic perspective will say that as long as the monsoon creates the weather of India and the Himalaya stands tall, the high flows in the rivers are the most expected hydrological events and we have to take ad-vantage from them rather than spending billions of rupees in trying to control such flows, conveniently called ‘floods’.”

If one continues to follow the traditional path of structural interventions, we will only create fertile grounds for continued conflicts, from environmental destruction to direct conflicts over sharing a limited gift of nature.

[Email This Post](#)

 Print  PDF

