

Some critical perspectives on water and environment policies in India

S.Janakarajan

Professor

Madras Institute of Development Studies

Chennai 600 020

janak@mids.ac.in

Need for contextualising policies

Water and environment in the wider context
in South Asia

Many changes and challenges have been encountered
in the past few decades

What are they?

What are the changes that the South Asian communities and economies have been experiencing during the past five decades?

- **Transformation:** very dynamic - socio-economic, agro-technical
- **Political:** stability, instability, lapses in governance and corruption and competitive populism
- **Openness** of rural economies
- **Globalization,** WTO, GATS, Privatization efforts etc

Challenges

- Rising demographic pressure
- Climate change, variability and extreme events
- Rapid industrialization
- Very high degree of urbanization and rising rural-urban migration
- Pollution of river basins and other water bodies
- Increasing food and environment insecurity
- Over-extraction of groundwater
- Seawater intrusion
- Competing demand for water
- Scarcity for drinking water and poor sanitation
- Water conflicts – of many types –
ranging from two individuals to two nations

To what extent our laws and policies have addressed these challenges?

A careful analysis will bring out the fact that

- On the one hand, traditional water institutions are on the decline – which evolved over a long period of time
- On the other, new institutional arrangements are either unimaginative or not implemented
- Huge gap between Natural sub-system and User sub-system
- Institutional sub-system, instead of restoring equilibrium between these two subsystems, messes up the whole system

Water and environmental policies and laws are extremely adhoc

Lacks commitment, imagination and highly myopic

-Example: Tamilnadu farmers' management of irrigation systems
Act 2000 – irrigation management transfer – formation of WUAs

The policy of public-private partnership (PPP)

Inter-state water dispute policies and the Act

Model groundwater bill – Policies and legislations

Environment policies, legislations and *judicial activism*

These policies and legislations are not backed by – policy enforcement and monitoring mechanisms

IMPACT OF POOR POLICY INTERVENTION

Water and Environmental federalism – increasing disputes between Centre and states and between states – due to lack of application of bottom-line principle

Federal structure under severe threat due to water and environment

Failure to address these changes and challenges have attracted multilateral agencies!!

For local problems, solutions are imposed by international agencies such as WB and GWP-
water pricing
water privatization
IWRM

Even the judiciary comes out with solutions –
Mega engineering - ILR

The state policies should aim at –
rather than being a provider
should perform the role of protector of water resources

How many states are protecting resources?

How many states are protecting environment?

The need of the hour:

Be adaptive, be flexible, and State and civil society should perform together and form partnerships in protecting water and environment

And for local problems solutions should emerge from below and cannot be imposed from above

Thank you