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MINISTRY OF WATER RESOURCES

National Water Policy, 1987

Need for a National Water Policy

1.1 Water is a prime natural resource, a basic human need and a precious national asset. Planning and development of water resources need to be governed by national perspectives.

1.2 It has been estimated that out of the total precipitation of around 400 million hectare meters in the country, the surface water availability is about 178 million hectare meters. Out of this about 50% can be put to beneficial use because of topographical and other constraints. In addition there is a ground water potential of about 42 million hectare meters. The availability of water is highly uneven in both space and time. Precipitation is confined to only about three or four months in the year and varies from 10 cm in the western parts of Rajasthan to over 1000 cm at Cherrapunji in Meghalaya. Further, water does not respect state boundaries. Not merely rivers but even under ground aquifers often cut across state boundaries. Water as a resource is one and indivisible: rainfall, river waters, surface ponds and lakes and ground water are all part of one system; water is a part of a larger ecological system.

1.3 Floods and drought affect vast areas of the country, transcending state boundaries. A third of the country is drought-prone. Floods affect an average area of around 9 million hectares per year. According to the National Commission on floods, the area susceptible to floods is around 40 million hectares. The approach to the management of drought and floods has to be coordinated and guided at the national level.

1.4 Even the planning and implementation of individual irrigation or multi-purpose projects, though done at the State level, involve a number of aspects and issues such as environmental protection, rehabilitation of project-affected people and livestock, public health consequences of water impoundment, dam safety, etc. On these matters common approaches and guidelines are necessary. Moreover, certain problems and

weaknesses have affected a large number of projects all over the country. There have been substantial time and cost overruns on projects. In some irrigation commands, problems of water-logging and soil salinity have emerged, leading to the degradation of good agricultural land. There are also complex problems of equity and social justice in regard to water distribution.

The development and exploitation of the country's groundwater resources also give rise to questions of judicious and scientific resource management and conservation. All these questions need to be tackled on the basis of common policies and strategies.

1.5 The growth process and the expansion of economic activities inevitably lead to increasing demands for water for diverse purposes: domestic, industrial, agricultural, hydro-power, navigation, recreation, etc. So far, the principal consumptive use of water has been for irrigation. While the irrigation potential is estimated to have increased from 19.5 million hectares at the time of Independence to about 68 million hectares at the end of the Sixth Plan, further development of a substantial order is necessary if the food and fiber needs of a growing population are to be met. The country's population which is over 750 million at present is expected to reach a level of around 1000 million by the turn of the century.

1.6 The production of food grains has increased from around 50 million tons in the fifties to about 150 million tons at present, but this will have to be raised to around 240 million tons by the year 2000 A.D. The drinking water needs of people and livestock have also to be met. In keeping with the objectives of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade Programme (1981-1991), adequate drinking water facilities have to be provided to the entire population in both urban and rural areas and sanitation facilities to 80 % of the urban population and 25 % of the rural population by the end of the decade. Domestic and industrial water needs have largely been concentrated in or near the principal cities, but the demand from rural society is expected to

increase sharply as the development programmes improve economic conditions in the rural areas. The demand for water for Hydro & Thermal power generation and for other industrial uses is also likely to increase substantially. As a result what which is already a scarcer in future. This under scores the need for the utmost efficiency in water utilisation and a public awareness of the importance of its conservation.

1.7 Another important aspect is water quality. Improvements in existing strategies and the innovation of new techniques resting on a strong science and technology base will be needed to eliminate the pollution of surface and ground water resources, to improve water quality and to step up the recycling and re- use of water. Science and technology and training have also important roles to play in water resources development in general.

1.8 Water is one of the most crucial elements in developmental planning. As the country prepares itself to enter the 21st century, efforts to develop, conserve, utilise and manage this important resource have to be guided by national perspectives. The need for a national water policy is thus abundantly clear: water is a scarce and precious national resource to be planned, developed and conserved as such, and on an integrated and environmentally sound basis, keeping in view the needs of the States concerned.

Information System

2. The prime requisite for resource planning is a well-developed information system. A standardized national information system should be established with a network of data banks and data bases, integrating and strengthening the existing Central and State level agencies and improving the quality of data and the processing capabilities. There should be free exchange of data among the various agencies and duplication in data collection should be avoided. Apart from the data regarding water availability and actual water use, the system should also include comprehensive and reasonably reliable projections of future demands for water for diverse purposes.

Maximizing availability

3.1 The water resources available to the country should be brought within the category of utilizable resources to the maximum possible extent. The resources should be conserved and the availability augmented by measures for maximizing retention and minimizing losses.

3.2 Resource planning in the case of water has to be done for a hydrological unit such as a drainage basin as a whole, or for a sub-basin. All individual developmental projects and proposals should be formulated by the States and considered within the framework of such an overall plan for a basin or sub-basin, so that the best possible combination of options can be made.

3.3 Appropriate organisations should be established for the planned development and management of a river basin as a whole. Special multi-disciplinary units should be set up in each state to prepare comprehensive plans taking into account not only the needs of irrigation but also harmonizing various other water uses, so that the available water resources are determined and put to optimum use having regard to subsisting agreements or awards of Tribunals under the relevant laws.

3.4 Water should be made available to water short areas by transfer from other areas including transfers from one river basin to another, based on a national perspective, after taking into account the requirements of the areas/basins.

3.5 Recycling and re-use of water should be an integral part of water resource development

Project Planning

4.1 Water resource development projects should as far as possible be planned and developed as multipurpose projects. Provision for drinking water should be a primary consideration. The projects should provide for irrigation, flood mitigation, hydro-electric power generation, navigation, pisciculture and recreation wherever possible.

4.2 The study of the impact of a project during construction and later on human lives, settlements, occupations, economic and other aspects should be an essential component of project planning.

4.3 In the planning, implementation and operation of projects, the preservation of the quality of environment and the ecological balance should be a primary consideration. The adverse impact, if any, on the environment should be minimised and should be off-set by adequate compensatory measures.

4.4 There should be an integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to the planning, formulation, clearance and implementation of projects, including catchment treatment and management, environmental and ecological aspects, the rehabilitation of affected people and command area development.

4.5 Special efforts should be made to investigate and formulate projects either in, or for the benefit of, areas inhabited by tribal or other specially disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In other areas also, project planning should pay special attention to the needs of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections of society.

4.6 The planning of projects in hilly areas should take into account the need to provide assured drinking water, possibilities of hydro-power development and the proper approach to irrigation in such areas, in the context of physical features and constraints such as steep slopes, rapid run-off and the incidence of soil erosion. The economic evaluation of projects in such areas should also take these factors into account.

4.7 Time and cost overruns and deficient realization of benefits characterizing most irrigation projects should be overcome by upgrading the quality of project preparation and management. The under-funding of projects should be obviated by an optimal allocation of resources, having regard to the early completion of on-going projects as well as the need to reduce regional imbalances.

Maintenance and Modernisation

5.1 Structures and systems created through massive investments should be properly maintained in good health. Appropriate annual provisions should be made for this purpose in the budgets.

5.2 There should be a regular monitoring of structures and systems and necessary rehabilitation and modernisation programmes should be undertaken.

Safety of Structures

6. There should be proper organizational arrangements at the national and state levels for ensuring the safety of storage dams and other water-related structures. The Central guidelines on the subject should be kept under constant review and periodically updated and reformulated. There should be a system of continuous surveillance and regular visits by experts.

Ground water Development

7.1 There should be a periodical reassessment on a scientific basis of the ground water potential, taking into consideration the quality of the water available and economic viability.

7.2 Exploitation of ground water resources should be so regulated as not to exceed the recharging possibilities, as also to ensure social equity. Ground water recharge projects should be developed and implemented for augmenting the available supplies.

7.3 Integrated and coordinated development of surface water and ground water and their conjunctive use, should be envisaged right from the project planning stage and should form an essential part of the project.

7.4 Over exploitation of ground water should be avoided near the coast to prevent ingress of sea water into sweet water aquifers.

Water Allocation Priorities

8. In the planning and operation of systems, water allocation priorities should be broadly as follows:

Drinking water
Irrigation
Hydro-power
Navigation
Industrial and other uses.

However these priorities might be modified if necessary in particular regions with reference to area specific considerations.

Drinking Water

9. Adequate drinking water facilities should be provided to the entire population both in urban and in rural areas by 1991. Irrigation and multipurpose projects should invariably include a drinking water component, wherever there is no alternative source of drinking water. Drinking water needs of human beings and animals should be the first charge on any available water.

Irrigation

10.1 Irrigation planning either in an individual project or in a basin as a whole should take into account the irrigability of land, cost-effective irrigation options possible from all available sources of water and appropriate irrigation techniques. The irrigation intensity should be such as to extend the benefits of irrigation to as large a number of farm families as possible, keeping in view the need to maximize production.

10.2 There should be a close integration of water-use and land-use policies.

10.3 Water allocation in an irrigation system should be done with due regard to equity and social justice. Disparities in the availability of water between head-reach and tail-end farms and between large and small

farms should be obviated by adoption of a rotational water distribution system and supply of water on a volumetric basis subject to certain ceilings.

10.4 Concerted efforts should be made to ensure that the irrigation potential created is fully utilised and the gap between the potential created and its utilisation is removed. For this purpose, the command area development approach should be adopted in all irrigation projects.

Water Rates

11. Water rates should be such as to convey the scarcity value of the resource to the users and to foster the motivation for economy in water-use. They should be adequate to cover the annual maintenance and operation charges and a part of the fixed costs. Efforts should be made to reach this ideal over a period, while ensuring the assured and timely supplies of irrigation water. The water rates for surface water and ground water should be rationalized with due regard to the interests of small and marginal farmers.

Participation of farmers and voluntary agencies

12. Efforts should be made to involve farmers progressively in various aspects of management of irrigation systems, particularly in water distribution and collection of water rates. Assistance of voluntary agencies should be enlisted in educating the farmers in efficient water use and water management.

Water Quality

13. Both surface water and ground water should be regularly monitored for quality. A phased programme should be undertaken for improvements in water quality.

Water Zoning

14. Economic development and activities including agricultural, industrial and urban development, should be planned with due regard to the constraints imposed by the configuration of water availability. There should be a water zoning of the country and the economic activities should be guided and regulated in accordance with such zoning.

Conservation of Water

15. The efficiency of utilisation in all the diverse uses of water should be improved and an awareness of water as a scarce resource should be fostered. Conservation consciousness should be promoted through education, regulation, incentives and disincentives.

Flood Control and Management

16. There should be a master plan for flood control and management for each flood prone basin. Sound watershed management through extensive soil conservation, catchment-area treatment, preservation of forests and increasing the forest area and the construction of check-dams should be promoted to reduce the intensity of floods. Adequate flood-cushion should be provided in water storage projects wherever feasible to facilitate better flood management. An extensive network for flood forecasting should be established for timely warning to the settlements in the flood plains, along with the regulation of settlements and economic activity in the flood plain zones, to minimize the loss of life and property on account of floods. While physical flood protection works like embankments and dykes will continue to be necessary, the emphasis should be on non-structural measures for the minimization of losses, such as flood forecasting and warning and flood plain zoning, so as to reduce the recurring expenditure on flood relief.

Land erosion by sea or river

17. The erosion of land, whether by the sea in coastal areas or by river waters inland, should be minimized by suitable cost-effective measures. The States and Union territories should also undertake all requisite steps to ensure that indiscriminate occupation and exploitation of coastal strips of land are discouraged and that the location of economic activities in areas adjacent to the sea is regulated.

Drought Management

18.1 Drought-prone areas should be made less vulnerable to drought-associated problems through soil-moisture conservation measures, water harvesting practices, the minimization of evaporation losses, the development of the ground water potential and the transfer of surface water from surplus areas where feasible and appropriate. Pastures, forestry or other modes of development which are relatively less water-demanding should be encouraged. In planning water resource development projects, the needs of drought-prone areas should be given priority.

18.2 Relief works undertaken for providing employment to drought-stricken populations should preferably be for drought proofing.

Science and Technology

19. For effective and economical management of our water resources, the frontiers of knowledge need to be pushed forward in several directions by intensifying research efforts in various areas, including the following :

- hydro-meteorology;
- assessment of water resources;
- snow and lake hydrology;
- ground water hydrology and recharge;
- prevention of salinity ingress;
- water-harvesting;
- evaporation and seepage losses;

- economical designs for water resource projects;
- crops and cropping systems;
- sedimentation of reservoirs;
- the safety and longevity of water-related structures;
- river morphology and hydraulics;
- soils and material research;
- better water management practices and improvements in operational technology;
- recycling and re-use;
- use of sea water resources.

Training

20. A perspective plan for standardized training should be an integral part of water resource development. It should cover training in information systems, sector planning, project planning and formulation, project management, operation of projects and their physical structures and systems and the management of the water distribution systems. The training should extend to all the categories of personnel involved in these activities as also the farmers.

Conclusion

21. In view of the vital importance of water for human and animal life, for maintaining ecological balance and for economic and developmental activities of all kinds, and considering its increasing scarcity, the planning and management of this resource and its optimal, economical and equitable use has become a matter of the utmost urgency. The success of the national water policy will depend entirely on the development and maintenance of a national consensus and commitments to its underlying principles and objectives.
