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Re-greening India: Water for All **(A critical need for the Coherence in Policies and Actions)**

Water is the most important resource for the survival of life on this planet, it is a fundamental human need and a critical national and international asset. In every drop of water, there is a story of life and livelihoods. Unfortunately, this precious resource is depleting swiftly everywhere. The world's water resources are, however, under increasing pressure from a growing human population, expected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050, and increasing per capita consumption of water, the demand for water will grow by an estimated 55 percent between now and 2050 exacerbating current pressure¹.

Climate change disrupts the water cycle, crisis of water will further increase due to rise in the average global temperature. Thus, the government and the citizens have "Common but differentiated responsibility²" to save the water for the future.

Irrigation consumes most of the water used by humans. Nevertheless, the demand for water far outweighs its supply. India has the capacity to store about 257 BCM of water (91 major reservoirs), an irrigated area of about 69 million ha³.

India has about 17 per cent of the world's population as compared to only 4 per cent of its water resources. The water sector in India has faced significant and problematic issues related to management. Despite a sizeable water resource base and vast land resource, challenges of water sector infrastructure requirements, including operating and upkeep costs.

With the present population of more than 1,000 million, the per capita water availability is around 1,170 cu m/person/year. Anything less than 1700 cubic meters per capita water, annually, as water stressed conditions, and anything less than 1000 cubic meters as water scarcity.

The current and impending water scarcity scenarios where 50% of irrigated agriculture is in areas of high and extreme water stress. There is a need for innovative and systems approaches that optimise the interdependencies of water, energy and food⁴.

Access to clean water is also a basic human right⁵. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) carved out by UN General Assembly also accepted the access to safe water as a

¹ Monique Barbut (2017) The Ripple Effect: A Fresh Approach to Reducing Drought Impacts and Building Resilience

² Principle 7 Rio Declaration 1992

³ total geographical area of the country is 328.7 million hectares, of which reported net sown area is 140.1 million hectares and the gross cropped area is 198.4 million hectares with a cropping intensity of 142 percent. The net area sown works out to be 43 percent of the total geographical area. The net irrigated area is 68.4 million hectares. (2018-Annual Report Ministry of Agriculture, GOI)

⁴ Ms. Katharine Cross, the International Water Association



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goal⁶. World Health Organization estimated⁷ that 97 million Indians lack access to safe water, second only to China. Moreover, some 21% of communicable diseases in India are related to unsafe water; diarrhoea alone causes more than 1,600 deaths daily—as if eight 200-person jumbo-jets crashed to the ground each day⁸.

Some of the important issues faced by the water sector in India include (a) erratic distribution of rain, often contributing to floods and droughts in several areas; (b) water use inefficiency; (c) unregulated groundwater extraction; (d) water pollution; and (e) decreasing water quality due to poor waste management laws, (f) interstate river disputes, (g) growing financial crunch for development of resources and (h) scarce safe drinking water. Inadequate institutional reforms and ineffective execution of existing provisions as well affect the performance level for water service delivery. Severe water shortages have led to a growing number of conflicts between users in the agricultural and industrial sectors, as also the domestic sector. The state of affairs is exacerbated due to the effects of climate change. Future predictions include worsening of the situation due to a disturbed hydrological cycle and regional climatic variability.

Debate Needed Today

The essence of the ‘debate needed today’ for policy coherence, revolving around: (a) Social Equity; (b) Healthy Environment and (c) Viable Economy. We should move away from conventional, narrowly defined approaches that focus primarily on specific projects and activities – such as big dams and large-scale transfer of river waters, and instead embrace natural approaches that have succeeded in India and other parts of the world.

The factors of concern not only for today, but also of deeper worry for tomorrow since they will be compounded by issues of population growth, climate change, and acceleration of social and economic aspirations. All these are still further compounded by an increasing lack of policy incoherence, not only in India but globally, as well. Failure to mitigate any and all of these concerns, can mean that a sudden catastrophic outcome cannot be ruled out, regionally, nationally or even globally.

As the problems of access to water become complex and multi-dimensional, it is abundantly clear that the key to success for change management and ability, not only to innovate and ‘think-outside-of-the-box’ to formulate solutions, but also to identify change agents with interdisciplinary skills who can bring in new ideas, methods and field work experience, to make these changes happen and remain sustainable.

⁵ UN General Assembly Resolution no 64/292 Dated 28/07/2010

⁶ Goal 6 of 2030 Sustainable Development Goal <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-6-clean-water-and-sanitation.html>

⁷ World Health Organization (WHO) accessed on 03.03.2018
http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/monitoring/jmp2012/fast_facts/en/

⁸ Securing Water for All (2015): A report of the Club of Rome



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However, we have to be constantly reminded that poor people, smallholder farmers and others who are going hungry NOW because of our failure to understand and work within our limits to growth, cannot wait while we address imbalances in our social, environmental, capital and human resources, at our pace. We need not only better and faster solutions, but we need to see them implemented on the ground almost on a 'yesterday' basis, if we are to avoid massive and sudden dislocations in our society.

There is a critical need for coherence in policies and actions and continuing our intense focus on our resources.

Many ideas, perceptions and measures were received from the participants in earlier events of the Club of Rome and Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies which helped clarify the issues- however they have to see in present policy dimensions and convert into implementation mode. The present seminar will create a path for the same.

Issues to be pondered

- 'Water for All' means for ALL living things and not only for humans. The agricultural sector needs to understand that it has to be more efficient and all-natural resources protected. Myopic approaches in attaining food security are risking agricultural sustainability by encouraging increased use of water.
- Per capita water availability must include disparity in water allocation and access.
- Too much or too little water- being a problem and advised that the creation of a model that effectively addresses both scenarios is essential.
- It is therefore necessary to have a comprehensive assessment of India's water sector, from an inter-disciplinary perspective.
- Educating technocrats working in various water - and environment-related departments with integration skills.

Policy Coherence for Securing Water Resources

The country's comprehensive National Water Policy (NWP), was formulated in 1987, revised in 2002. In 2012, a draft NWP has been put up for debate. Critiques point out that the most striking feature of 2012 NWP is the absence of a commitment towards Right to Water. Instead, the overall direction of the policy is to reduce the involvement of the State and leave out space for market to operate- How much it should be in the hands of the market, what is the role of the welfare state and ensuring social justice and access of water for poor and needy persons and how to ensure, etc. are the issues which have to reflect upon.

Water is an immeasurably political issue. This resource interacts with a highly inequitable society marked with class, caste and gender differentiation. Techno-managerial reforms in the water sector cannot tackle the issues of inequity in the water supply. India has signed the 2010 United Nations (UN) declaration of water as a right, this gives equal opportunities for all. Rights could also be a useful strategic instrument, especially in negotiations with



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governments and donors. The right-based approach provides opportunities to communities in decision making water-related projects and plans and have access to information concerning water- which somehow feeble in Indian context.

Ensuring right to water means that the obligation to guarantee that everyone has access to safe clean water rests with governments. While lack of both financial and technical resources is in some cases an important barrier to a government's ability to ensure access to water for all.

India is rich in policy designing; however, it has been perceived that there is a difference in rhetoric and reality in policy implementation. The country has witnessed a huge service delivery failure. Consequently, the challenges related to forests, water and ecological footprints are overwhelming. We need a retrospective policy analysis, which in turn will lead to prospective policy analysis pertaining to Water, environment and ecosystem protection at large.

The conclusions from the seminar clearly homed in on three instrumentalities in which India needs great and immediate improvement: Innovation, particularly in institutions and technology; Investment, particularly in people and nature; and Coherence, particularly in the making of policies and economic structures.

The focus is to evolve an environment where water is available for all in a sustainable manner—safe drinking water for basic needs, adequate water for agriculture, water for industry and for the ecosystem. Thus, it encompasses both a depiction of the state of freshwater resources and potential problems and progress towards identifying goals, including workable solutions.

So, the challenge before our meeting is to identify the Innovations, Investments and Convergences that India now has to bring about to create a development pathway that provides all its citizens, rich and poor, with an adequate quality of water without destroying its sources.

Overall, the Big Questions before the seminar:

1. *What are examples of major policy conflicts relating to Water sectors and other sectors of natural resources that impact “Water for All”?*
2. *What structural changes are needed in governance to ensure that the policies affecting Water are coherent, convergent and mutually reinforcing? Is ‘Right to Water Act’ needed in India?*
3. *What are the knowledge gaps or other barriers that prevent rational policy formulation for water resources? How to make a future path for the Water for All in India?*



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The Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies was initiated in 1991, as a policy think tank promoted by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. RGICS carries out research and policy development on contemporary challenges facing India. The aim is to understand and direct the paradigmatic changes — social, economic and political — towards a more equitable social order.

(<http://www.rgics.org>)



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Established in 2011, The Indian National Association for the Club of Rome (CoR-India) is a non-profit organisation, which aims “to act as a global catalyst for change through the identification and analysis of the crucial problems facing India and the communication of such problems to the most important public and private decision makers as well as to the general public.” The broad goal of the national chapter, CoR-India, is to help design an agenda for governments in India, the business sector as well as all its citizens’ organisations that could enable everybody in this country to live a full life in harmony with their surroundings by the centenary of the nation, 2047.

(www.clubofrome.in)