

Water wars and resolution*

Water is no longer only a resource, but also a topic of conflict. It is limited and cannot be expanded; so the only option is its efficient management. There are conflicts between neighbouring states for sharing of water within a country, and also among neighbouring countries. There is also a conflict between agriculture and industry, and between fishermen and farmers. When it comes to reservoirs, flood control and irrigation are in conflict. Different regions have different kinds of conflict, which need to be addressed differently. Conflicts arise when disagreements occur between people with varied interests. They can be categorized as belonging to two broad types: inter-state transboundary and intra-state intersectoral. Inter-sectoral issues have to be seen at multiple levels of stakeholders. Sharing of water is the root cause of a conflict. Ownership is another issue related to it.

How can we deal with water conflicts in India? How can these conflicts be resolved? Can we prevent these conflicts from arising? All these questions were attempted to be answered during a consultation organized by the School of Social Sciences at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore.

V. S. Ramamurthy (NIAS) said that a multidisciplinary approach has to be adopted keeping in mind the industrial, agricultural and household uses of water. One must also consider ocean water because there is ignorance about the utilization of ocean water; the influence of ocean waters on water cycles is high. 'The concept of interlinking of rivers is an area drawing controversy', said Suresh Prabhu (Global Water Partnership). He also said that we must have a mechanism such that conflict does not result when monsoon fails. He proposed engaging farmers from different states through zonal water partnerships in India.

Vijay Paranjpye (Gomukh, Pune) elaborated upon the ownership issues. The concept of ownership, he said, is like an economic concept under which water could be sold, bought, leased and owned. Because of a conveniently located land, more water can be accessed. Anil Mohile (Central Water Commission, New Delhi) suggested that water, although a common resource should become a 'negative community property' where no one uses water at the peril of others, rather than a 'community property' where anybody and everybody could use water.

Political ecology of pollution in the Periyar river was discussed by N. C. Narayanan (Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay, Mumbai), wherein he raised issues of environmental degradation and effects of pollution in the Periyar river. Tapan K. Padhi (National Institute for Development, Bhubaneswar) and Sailen Routray (NIAS) presented their study on 'Conflicts over Hirakud: Technology, politics, and management'.

Anil Abbi (Small Grants Programme – India, Bangalore) presented a case study of the Varada river, its conflicts and resolution. Causes of conflict are droughts, floods, flow problems (high flows or low flows), and interlinking of rivers plan of the National Water Development Agency. There is a need of catchment abstraction management strategy for establishment of a Varada Development Authority. Arati Gupta (Prakriti, Shimla) discussed the 'Competing claims and potentials of water resources for energy, biodiversity and productive capacities'. Hilly areas have fragile ecosystems and there is increased run-off, land instability, and increase in flood and erosion.

Anjal Prakash (SaciWATERS, Hyderabad) and Jasveen Jairath (Society for Participatory Development, Hyderabad) talked about the conflicts that might result from the creation of a new Telangana State in India. S. Janakarajan (Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai) pondered upon 'Conflicts, contradiction and competition – the urban-peri-urban catchments'. Peri-urban areas are being exploited by the urban areas as dumping grounds for urban wastes. This leads to conflicts, also fuelled by the transport of groundwater from peri-urban

to urban areas. K. N. Joshi (Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur) highlighted the absence of a proper landuse policy in Rajasthan.

S. Viswanath (Rainwater Club, Bangalore) discussed the role of technologies for resolution of water conflicts. Technology for conflict resolution is premised on the production of detailed data and hence the arrival of an objective conclusion. But, it is time- and space-dependent. 'Water conflicts and gender: beyond rhetoric' was the theme dealt with by Smitha-Mishra Panda (Human Development Foundation, Bhubaneswar). She highlighted that men and women experience water conflicts differently because of different socio-culturally defined gender roles. Gender mainstreaming is a way to creating women-focused activities. Shift from 'women and water' to 'gender and water' has not happened. Ensuring inalienable property rights for women through a regulatory framework could be done.

Shantha Mohan (NIAS), who organized the consultation, suggested that we could separate land and water rights for women, and to centrestage the role of women in conflict resolution the number of women in institutional fora has to go up. Veena Khanduri (India Water Partnership, New Delhi) said, 'Capacity-building is important for spreading the message to the women whether the issue is of multi-state dialogue or other debates and discussions'.

'Legal aspects regarding water sharing in relation to climate change concerns' were discussed by Mohile. The following legal arrangements were proposed to solve the crisis: rework the inter-state agreements, and make amendments in the Indian Contracts Act and Constitution. Legal framework to address transboundary inter-sectoral water-sharing dispute resolution was discussed by Geetha Devi (Advocate, Bangalore). She proposed 'negotiation' to redress water disputes and 'mediation' employing a third party/impartial person(s) to facilitate negotiation between the parties in dispute.

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