

## **Effectiveness of National Water Policy 2002 for Development:**

### **A Summary**

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The French word for "policy" is *politique*, which is closer to the word "politics" in the English language than the word "policy". In this paper, therefore, the meaning of policy is dealt with as akin to "*politique*".

In order to gauge the "effectiveness" of the Water Policy for Development of society, it is necessary to conceptually examine whether the water policy can, as an effect, lead to the development of society. For this examination, it is necessary to posit the concepts of social development as the end-objectives to be achieved and whether the water policy shares these objectives and leads to the creation of means and resources that will result in social development. The introductory part of the paper takes the views of Nobel Laureate Gunnar Myrdal as positing the concepts of social development as:

1. Egalitarian reforms are not a burden on an economy but a means to lift that economy;
2. Egalitarian reforms are highly productive and highly profitable from the national point of view
3. Economists as a profession are too narrow minded in their approach to social development
4. For all Asian countries, the supreme aim of planning must be the conquest of the poverty of the masses.

The NWP 2002 is examined with respect to the above stated objectives of social development, in three parts:

**Part I:** examines the NWP 2002 in general terms wherein the contexts are both national and international

**Part II:** examines NWP 2002 in detailed specific terms, subjected to a clause - by-clause examination of the major clauses and their implications in developmental terms.

**Part III**: discusses an alternative structure for Water Policy for India that would be desirable and its implications for social development.

At the end of this three part examination (wherein an alternative policy framework sharply highlights the inadequacies of an existing policy framework), the NWP 2002 is judged with respect to the objectives of social development.

It is on this basis that an eventual judgement is made as to whether this policy can effectively bring development to this society i.e. specifically, India. The conclusion arrived at, based on the above process of examination, is that the National Water Policy 2002 is unlikely to meet developmental objectives and is not conducive to long term social development.

A brief summary of the 3 parts of the paper are as follows :

**Part I**: Contexts of NWP2002 in general terms

1. The water policy lacks developmental linkages and inter-sectoral linkages. Water policy should have interconnected important sectors such as Agricultural Development, Animal Husbandry, Industrial Development, Urban Development, Environment Sector and Health Sector. It fails to satisfactorily do so, indicating the absence of a genuine developmental perspective; an interlinkage of water with social sector, environment and agriculture is discussed.
2. Water is treated as a "national asset", which is questionable under the division of powers between Union, State and Local Governments as enshrined in the Indian Constitution. This treatment of water as a "national asset" paves the way for the eventual privatisation of water, to be brought about so that "politically necessary but unpopular" reforms of the water sector are brought about by private companies rather than politicians. These "reforms" include raising tariffs, collecting unpaid dues and reducing the workforce. The real meaning of "reforms" can thus be seen clearly.
3. The Indian sub-continent has demographic particularities i.e. concentration of populations in the Gangetic valley and both coastal plains, whereas about 70% of the interior lands have low / medium rainfall and relatively low population distribution. This particular mal-distribution of land, water and productive factors should have led to a completely different strategic

perspective on water policy if an egalitarian society is to be built. The water policy lacks any specific identification of the deprived communities / population groups inhabiting the historically deprived areas and adversely affected by lack of access to water. These groups include tribals, dalits, nomadic communities, small and marginal cultivating peasantry, skilled artisanal communities as well as women and children forced to fetch water from enormous distances. This water policy is a bland policy for India without specific meaning for the majority of sociologically and existentially real Indians.

4. The water policy has completely disregarded the genuine international discourse on large dams and development which has articulated that large dams display large variability in delivery of water / electricity, are prone to large cost / time overruns, have more negative than positive impacts on environment, ecosystems and species, have systematically failed to assess negative impacts and have poor accounting of environmental and social costs.

Despite these international findings, the NWP continues on a track of large projects based on highly questionable techno-economic assumptions.

This track will open the way for a large scale inter linking of rivers, irrespective of costs and consequences. Moreover, the proposal for large scale inter linking of rivers has been carefully kept out of specific discussion in the policy document, which is not acceptable in a democratic polity.

5. On the other hand, there is an excessive submission to the pressures and international manipulations for privatization of water. Those responsible for the pressures and manipulations include the multilateral financing organizations (World Bank / FAO), amorphous global entities essentially promoted by the private sector (World Water Council / Global Water Partnership / World Water Forum etc.), the hundreds of large multinational corporations in the water and related sectors and their silent mercenary armies of "experts", "consultants", retired bureaucrats, technicians, "policy makers" and so on. The manufactured consensus created by them include the creation of documents according to some pre-conceived formats uniformly entitled "Water Visions" and "Framework For Action (FFA)" documents. These

- uniformly arrive at the consensual decision promoting privatization of water and the financial and institutional arrangements for effecting the "consensus".
6. An international climate of opinion has sought to create recurrent fears of famine and drought related to population growth in poorer countries. In point of historical fact, there were millions of deaths during the period of British colonial rule but as far as independent India is concerned, this is a fear now to be relegated to the past. Nevertheless, international "experts" continue to play upon these fears and the national policy documents do not repudiate such tendentious analysis.
  7. The financial performance of the large scale irrigation sector, as drawn from Government of India's own documentary sources, indicates an extraordinarily high degree of cost and time overruns. This overuse of financial resources in this sector has negated developmental objectives that could have been achieved by other sectors.

## **Part II:** Specific examination of NWP 2002

In this part, a clause-by-clause examination of the entire NWP 2002 has been conducted.

Clauses 1.2 and 1.3 refer to the indivisibility of water as a resource, which contradicts the hierarchical view of a "national" asset.

Clause 1.5 refers to floods and droughts affecting vast areas of the country, yet there is systematic and gross underestimation of draught, and lack of identification of causes of floods.

Clause 1.6 simply states that there are "complex issues of equity and social justice" yet beyond this statement of the obvious, there is no attempt to even outline the solution to the central problem of distributional equity.

Clause 1.7 states the need for further development of a substantial order in irrigated area but does not indicate available options.

Clause 1.8 projects demand for food grains with respect to future population growth. The projection is unidimensional and simplistic.

Clause 1.9 deals with water quality but neither links its deterioration specifically to developmental causation, human health or consequences for environmental destruction.

Clauses 2.1 - 2.3 address the need for a standardized national information system, but it is not clear whether public access is to be permitted.

Clauses 3.1 - 3.5 deal with Water Resources Planning.

Clause 3.2 deals with inter-basin transfers, which can lead to gross violation of the principle of equity in water distribution, and are to be considered acts of power with enormous potential for long term political problems between regions and states. This clause is being used for the inter-linking of rivers.

Clauses 3.3 and 3.4 refer to planning for a hydrological unit such as a drainage basin or sub-basin and brings together quantity and quality aspects as well as environmental considerations. These clauses, if logically developed and applied, can integrate many developmental and social policies resulting in decentralized development. These clauses can be applied in all areas of uncertain rainfall (semi-arid and arid) as well as mountain valley regions and heavy rainfall flood prone regions. Unfortunately NWP 2002 has lost the opportunity to use this scientific concept for effecting a paradigm change in its own thinking.

Clause 3.5 again shifts the focus to inter-basin water transfers based on national perspectives, thereby negating the value of decentralized water resource development on the basis of hydrological unit.

Clauses 4.1 - 4.2 refer to institutional mechanisms for planning / management / development of hydrological units. Internationally accepted practices tend to favour River Basin Organisation (RBOs), which are consistent with comprehensive watershed planning but inconsistent with inter basin transfers.

Clause 5 deals with Water Allocation Priorities, indicated as drinking water / irrigation/ hydropower / ecology / agro-industries / non-agricultural industries / navigation / others. These priorities should have been derived coherently from the social and developmental perspective. They should have logically preceded the clauses on Water Resources Planning.

Clauses 6.1 - 6.8 deal with considerations that should underlie water resource development projects eg. provision of drinking water, likely impacts on human lives, impact on environment etc. These clauses should have immediately followed the clauses on Water Resources Planning.

Clauses 7.1 - 7.4 deals with Ground Water Development and the need for periodical reassessment, regulation, integration and conjunctive use and ensuring social equity. Yet the clauses do not focus on policies and agencies to ensure ground water recharge, the wasteful uses of ground water and electrical energy for pumping which is resulting in a double wastage of resources, and conservation of ground water for use during drought years.

Clause 8 deal with according first charge to drinking water for humans and animals, which is unexceptionable.

Clauses 9.1 - 9.5 deal with irrigation and the need to consider cost effective irrigation options from all water sources to benefit as large a number of families as possible. Yet these clauses fail to draw the appropriate physical and financial conclusions that large scale irrigation projects are far more expensive and proportionately benefit lesser number of households compared to other forms of irrigation.

Clauses 10 deals with the need for a policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation which has yet to be cleared.

Clause 11 deals with physical and financial sustainability but with no attempt to address the complex issues of "internalization" of environmental and social costs. All discussion on sustainable development are now based on the assumption of equity but this is not considered in this clause.

Clause 12 advocates a participatory approach to water resources management but does not link it to the basic hydrological unit, the basin or sub-basin.

Clause 13 introduces for the first time the concept of private sector participation in building, owning, operating, leasing and transferring of water resources facilities. This attempt at privatisation of water has met with stiff public opposition in many countries across the world.

Clause 14 deals with the need for monitoring quality of both surface and ground water but lacks any sense of urgency. It also does not make an explicit linkage between water quality and human and animal health. The Office of Technology Assessment, US Congress reports that contamination of ground water is an essentially irreversible process and therefore prevention of ground water contamination is the only means currently available.

clause 15 advocates water zoning in the country but makes not even a preliminary effort at zone definition and the logical consequences that flow from it such as location of water intensive industries and water intensive crops as well as water polluting industries and agricultural pollution due to agriculture.

Clause 16 deals with conservation of water and the technical means of conservation; it does not discuss ecological mechanisms that support conservation nor develop its own logic of basin / sub-basin as hydrological unit for conservation purposes.

Clauses 17.1 - 17.5 espouse the need for a master plan for flood control for each flood prone basin but shifts the emphasis towards forecasting, zoning and flood proofing. It does not develop its own logic of basin / sub-basin approach and ecological approaches to flood control.

Clauses 18.1 and 18.2 deal with land erosion by sea and river, with the perception being that indiscriminate occupation and exploitation of coastal strips of land being linked to erosion. The overdrawal of sweet water in coastal areas leading to salt water ingress and permanent damage to land, resulting from coastal industrialization, is not recognized.

Clause 19.1 and 19.2 deal with drought prone area development, which should have been the centre piece of policy as it applies to the largest portion of India's lands. However, the problems of drought prone areas are deemphasised and underestimated, nor is the logic of hydrological unit developed consistently in this approach.

Clauses 20.1 and 20.2 and 22 deal with monitoring of projects and performance improvement. Although the need for monitoring and performance improvement are glaringly obvious and have been reported by government reports since the seventies

and eighties, the weakness of this clause indicates that the lessons have yet to percolate into the bureaucratic mind.

Clauses 21.1 - 21. 2 deal with water sharing and distribution among states, to be guided by unclear "national perspectives". Such powers of interference from the national level are not as per the powers envisaged within the Constitution. This clause will result in centralization of powers.

Clauses 23.1 - 23.3 relate to maintenance and modernization and the rather obvious need for making annual budgetary provisions for these. These clauses indicate a poor understanding of sound economic management.

Clause 25 deals with Science and Technology and is an elaborate technical wish list, under emphasizing environmental impacts. It also includes regional equity under S & T which is an indication of gross confusion of intellectual categories.

Clause 26 deals with standardised training in information systems, sectoral planning, project planning, operation and maintenance of projects and the management of distribution systems. The training needs projected seem to be the perceived needs of the bureaucracy and not those of user organizations, local governance bodies or community organisations; needs such as conducting local water balances, equitable distribution, local conservation, changes in cropping patterns etc are not included, indicating that the needs of the larger society have not been understood and internalised in the policy.

Clause 27 concludes that each state must formulate its own water policy within a period of two years, backed by an operational plan. However, the National Policy has not tied itself down to any explicit time frame, objectives or policy consensus.

Our conclusion based on the clause-by-clause examination is that the developmental objectives are not explicit, the intersectoral linkages are not integrated, the policy is not moored in social and economic realities and is unable to frame or resolve multiple polarities. These are polarities between privatisation and community / public control, between centralisation and decentralisation, between directional inertia of earlier policy and the present need to alter both direction and paradigm. We are forced to conclude that the policy is "anti-people".

### **Part III:** An alternative approach to the role of water in development

An alternative approach to the role of water in development for India is undertaken because the establishment, when criticised, often retorts that the critics have no alternative to offer. The alternative offered here explicitly shows linkages between objectives of social development, poverty removal, employment generation, agricultural - industrial - rural development, equitable and ecologically sustainable development.

The basic approach utilizes the concept of hydrological unit as the core for redefining the spatial module of development. This modular approach integrates hydrological and ecological balances with increased biomass productivity in the hydrological unit (sub-basin of 100-300 sq. Km or 10,000-30,000 ha area), decentralized rural industrialisation based on biomass processing industry, development of backward linkages to agriculture / horticulture and animal husbandry, development of forward linkages to urban markets and distant industries, development of local infrastructure including necessary social infrastructure. The needs and objectives of social development are accorded primacy subject to ecological, technical and financial processes as well as participatory decision-making procedures. The modular approach can be applied to semi-arid and arid sub-basin watersheds, to flood prone sub-basins, to mountainous and valley regions, to forested / tribal uplands and to coastal plains in India. A large part of India can be brought under decentralized, participatory governance and equitable and ecologically sustainable land-water based development. Moreover, the financial burden can be portioned between bankable and non-bankable components, with the non-bankable component coordinated and supported through productive public expenditure. If properly conducted, the financial consequences for the public sector banking industry in India is likely to prove largely healthy. A preliminary examination of costs for a large state like Maharashtra indicates that the approach is well within the financing capability of the state. If the logic is extended to major parts of the land area of the country in different eco-regions, the financial costs are much lower than the centralised, top-down and inequitable approach involved in the national inter-linking of rivers.

Since the examination of the alternative approach to water resource planning and development shows that equitable, decentralized, participatory and ecologically sensitive development can emerge at lower cost and lower risks of deviance from

objectives, the credibility of the national water policy framed in 2002 is questionable. The three part examination indicates that the water policy as currently framed cannot result in effective social development.

a. **Events**

Mumbai Paani has been associated with Indore based artist- **Namita Kulkarni** who will be exhibiting her paintings under the title of **“Timeless Water to Waterless Times”**. This will be held at **National Centre for Performing Art (NCPA)** in Mumbai from **29<sup>th</sup> May 2008 to 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2008**. Please find details of the artist, her work and her thoughts behind the association in the documents below.