

## **Rapporteur's Note on Water Management System: Session - I**

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The major natural resources causing concern in India is water both in its availability, use and after effects. While some pockets suffer for even drinking water, another region agonizes the side effects of the flood water. This occurs largely due to poor management practices adopted by both Government officials and farmers. While officials blame the farmers for their free riding attitude, the farmers genuinely accuse the poor quality of infrastructures developed to utilise the water optimally with controls. On the whole, there seems to be no proper answer for these hunches.

The session of the seminar was focused on the impact of irrigation on equity in distribution, specifically with command area and its positive externalities in various other spheres was also emphasised. Further, the importance of groundwater in the resource scarce regions and the problems in imposing the water rates on groundwater use were focused as the major areas. Hence, water resource has to be seen as a holistic resource along with land use, the problem of soil and water management. Thus, there is a need to connect the use of all these resources to assess the problem.

With in this broader perspective, the presentation of the papers followed. The focus of the papers are given in brief. The first paper by Prof. R.K. Patil made it clear out of his long years of experience on water management and water distribution in major irrigation projects that the Government's role in the distribution of water does not contribute to the better use of water. Hence, there is a need for farmers' or users' participation in water management. But the bureaucrats to have a power over farmers come in the way with the justification of farmers inability.

This was followed by the presentation by Shri Lele. He explained the suppression of farmers by bureaucracy through Command Area development approach particularly the imposition of cropping pattern and warabhandi. It was suggested that water fee collection should be entrusted to farmer's association, particularly the type that the world bank approach prescribed, i.e., making associations at micro level to manage water use. It should be block type at the micro level with 1000 to 2000 hectares.

The next two papers in the session were presented in absentia by the rapporteur and the Chairman of the session respectively. The first paper was a critical review of distribution of irrigation across size of holding and the finding indicates that it would be valid only if the existing agrarian structure in terms of land distribution across size classes is either normal or less skewed. But, agrarian structure in India is neither normal nor biased towards small farmers.

The other paper makes an attempt to show how the failure of public policy, institutions and markets has led to the problems ranging from human misery to environmental distortions in diverse environments. It emphasises that the prevailing conditions in rural areas (related to water) are the manifestation of misguided policies and water management rather than scarcity of water.

Then the chairman of the session, summarised the presentation of both the papers. He made a few observations on these problems, keeping focus of the seminar in the background. He observed that since the beginning of plan period, massive investments have been made on irrigation, but the potentialities created is not matching the amount spent. He explained that this is mainly due to problems in two stages, viz.,