

Role of Civil Society for Efficient Water Management

Background

India is facing water challenges stemming not only from the limited availability of water resources but also its mismanagement. The average annual per capita water availability in the years 2001 and 2011 was assessed as 1816 cubic meters and 1545 cubic meters respectively which would have further reduced to 1486 cubic meters in the year 2021 as per projected population growth. With increasing urbanization and water demand, we have seen a decline of almost 20% in the last two decades and is likely to further decline by another 20% by 2050 (CWC study on Reassessment of Water Availability in India using Space Inputs-2019).

If appropriate and time-bound measures are not taken, the country will see a severe water crisis soon. Thus, management of water resources becomes crucial for India's economic growth and ecosystem sustainability.

Civil society is an important stakeholder of the water management regime in India, and it plays an influential role in bringing reforms to policies, institutions, decision making and implementation of projects. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) connect the policy makers (Government or international development agencies) to the ultimate beneficiaries (communities/people/citizens). They also play an important role for

“CSOs are considered as an important stakeholder in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) as they represent the interests of diverse, sometimes underrepresented groups of the public and communicate their concerns and preferences to decision-makers. Under the concept of public participation, CSOs are included in planning processes to improve decision-making and increase awareness, commitment, and accountability for the planned actions.”

- GWP IWRM Toolbox



Question-Answer Session during Panel Discussion

advocacy campaigns with the support of multistakeholder groups (government, funding agencies, line departments, academia and citizen groups) to bring improvement in water governance and its effective management.

Recognizing the important role the CSOs play in water management in the country, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Government of India invited India Water Partnership (IWP) to organize a Panel Discussion on **“Role of Civil Society in efficient Water Management during 7th India Water Week 2022”** which was organized from 1st to 5th November, 2022 at India Expo Centre, Greater NOIDA, Uttar Pradesh on the theme **“Water Security for Sustainable Development with Equity”**.

Panel Discussion

The Panel Discussion was organized on 3rd November, 2022 under the Chairmanship of Shri A B Pandya, Honorary Member, IWP; Regional Council Member, GWP-South Asia; Secretary General, International Commission on Irrigation & Drainage & Former Chairman, Central Water Commission, Government of India. Dr. Veena Khanduri coordinated and moderated the panel discussion. Shri Shiv Kumar Sharma, Director, BCD (E&NE), Central Water Commission, Government of India, the Nodal Officer nominated by 7th India Water Week Secretariat facilitated the panel discussion.



Panel Discussion during 7th India Water Week

support from the government and the space they are providing to the Civil Society for playing their coveted role in decision making, planning & execution. Finally, the panel also discussed the role and functioning of CSOs, changing with time and how they are coping with the emerging challenges of water management in the country.

The panel comprised of six panelists from the CSOs working in the water and allied sectors and having experience as policy influencers, action research, legal and governance, and impactful grassroots activities shared their knowledge. These panelists were Dr. Asad Umar, Director, WASH & Health, Aga Khan Foundation; Shri V K Madhavan, Chief Executive, Water Aid, India; Shri Rajapandian R, Chief Executive Officer, Sustainable Healthcare Advancement Trust of Dhan Foundation; Dr. Nupur Bahadur, Senior Fellow & Head of the NMCG-TERI Centre of Excellence on Water Reuse in the Water Resources Division of TERI; Shri Shawahiq Siddiqui, Founding Partner, Indian Environment Law Organization and Water & Environmental Expert; and Shri Suresh Babu S V, Director, River Basins & Water Policy, WWF-India.

The discussion revolved around contribution of CSOs at local, state and national levels and the kind of issues and challenges faced by them. Further, the discussion went on to evaluate the

Key Recommendations

IWP shared the following key recommendations resulting from the panel discussion to the 7th India Water Week Secretariat:

- CSOs are best suited for interacting with communities and they shall continue to act as bridge between government and the community and their role is expected to become more important in coming times.
- The collaborative and not the combative streak of the relationship between Government and CSO's needs to grow.
- The major strengths of CSO's are flexibility, innovation in approach and capacity to mobilize communities but they face challenges in the form of scalability of their projects for logistical and exposure constraints. The government and corporations need to support the CSOs for the same.
- CSOs shall act as a bridge between policies and initiatives taken-up at macro level by the appropriate government and facilitate the implementation and adoption with the target communities at the local level.
- CSO's should be involved in water resources management projects at all levels from decision making, planning, execution and post execution also. This is important as they need to be aware of the overall picture for effective water management in the country.
- Close coordination between Government and CSO's have always led to achievement of desired results and the relationship must be institutionalized to ensure long term association and impacts.
- CSOs need to develop capacities for understanding underlying principles of planning and design and act as a harbinger of change in their communities to bring water management initiatives in tune with local constraints and changed demand scenarios while implementing the plans for water security.
- Corporate Sector must build symbiotic relationship with CSOs for projects on water management and support them with knowledge and finances for efficient management of water resources in India at all levels.