

Comment on NWRC meeting, 281212

December 28, 2012

NWRC meeting in Delhi to discuss National Water Policy 2012

PM and MoWR has nothing new to say:

Cannot define good governance; cannot regulate groundwater;

Indirect advocacy for big storages, centralisation

Prime Minister's opening remarks at the NWRC on Dec 28, 2012 (meeting after over a decade, the previous meeting happened on April 1, 2002) talked about water security and sustainability for all, but no rights to water to people, only the rights of the states. He talked about good governance, but he has no specific suggestion of how to achieve that: <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=91211>

The Prime Minister said a suggestion has been made for "national legal framework of general principles on water, which, in turn, would pave the way for essential legislation on water governance in every State" but claims that won't lead to centralisation. But as many states fear, the intent of water resource establishment has been towards greater centralisation.

The Prime Minister talked about "preservation of river corridors" but not about preservation of rivers.

Dr Manmohan Singh acknowledged "groundwater has a prominent role in meeting the requirements of water for drinking and other purposes" and that it remains unregulated, and only suggestion he has in this regard is to take "steps to minimize misuse of groundwater by regulating the use of electricity for its extraction" but that is not likely to help as experience of decades show.

PM mentions substantially increased outlays for water sector and acknowledges these wont deliver without good governance, but "national consensus on the common denominators of water governance is therefore essential" but yet unachieved, and he has not suggestions in this regard.

PM ends by saying on water security we have to "swim together or sink together". We can sink only in sewage in Delhi, Sir, there is no freshwater in the river! He does not mention a word about industrial pollution, nor (thanks), about privatisation or interlinking of rivers. But the policy he proposes has it all.

In his speech at NWRC, he mentions his speech the day before at the NDC meet to approve the 12th five year plan (see: <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=91191>), where on water sector he said: "We are rapidly approaching the position where the total demand for water in the country simply cannot be met by available supply... Available water also needs to be allocated to different uses through a Water Regulatory Authority. This is an area where action lies largely in the domain of State Governments." Interesting, but the only functioning WRA that exists in India does not have this function assigned to it. The Maharashtra govt took that function away from the MWRRA de facto right from the beginning and de jure through an amendment in 2010, the PM seems to be uninformed about this. The proposal for WRA in all states as stated by PM as in the NWP 2012 is clearly a non starter.

At 14.52 MWR came out with a PR (<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=91218>) in which, the Union Minister of Water Resources Harish Rawat said, “water needs to be allocated in a manner which maximises its value.” This is a dangerous proposition, as against the need to enshrine right to water in legal domain this advocacy would mean that if five star hotels can pay more for the same quantity of water compared to the needs of the poor, water should go for five star hotels rather than livelihood needs of the farmers or the basic needs of poor. In fact the previous day the PM said, “Paradoxically, we should not aim at increasing total employment in agriculture. In fact, we need to move people out of agriculture by giving them gainful employment in the non agricultural sector.” This sounds particularly ominous since the gainful employment in the non agricultural sector is not increasing.

The Union Water Resources Minister also said, “India would need around 450 billion Cubic Metres (BCM) of water storages in the country by 2050 to meet the water requirements of various sectors. As on today, we have only 253 BCM storage capacity available”. However, storage can also be created through smaller projects and also through underground storages and the figure of 253 BCM used by the minister does not include these options. This thus means the minister is advocating for big projects when such projects have proved to be ineffective.

The Press Release at 18.33 hours (<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx?relid=91240>) said that the National Water Policy was adopted “consensus in this regard was made” and that some changes will be done in the policy as discussed at NWRC. We need to wait and see what changes are made, since the final version is yet to be uploaded on the MWR website (<http://mowr.gov.in/index1.asp?linkid=201&langid=1>). It was good to see this final PR saying: “Reservations were expressed by States on Inter Basin Transfer of water” and “after elongated discussions there were broader consensus on the issues of community management of water resources, climate change adaptation strategy particularly increasing water storage through revival of traditional water harvesting structures and water bodies and efficient use of water”. It remains to be seen if this becomes the core of the new water policy, programmes and practices or just lip service.

However, if we look at the 12th Plan document adopted the previous day by National Development Council and allocation of unprecedented Rs 4.22 lakh crores for water sector a lions share of it for the failed major and medium irrigation projects, there is not too much hope.

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For a letter to NWRC from 22 individuals and groups, including some eminent persons and well known groups, see:

https://sandrp.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/letter_to_nwrc_on_new_national_water_policy_dec2012.pdf