

White Paper on Irrigation in Maharashtra

Who is the Maharashtra Govt fooling?

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Long overdue & much awaited White Paper (WP) on Irrigation in Maharashtra has finally been issued by Water Resources Department (WRD), Government of Maharashtra (GoM) on 29th Nov 2012. It is available on WRD's website (www.mahawrd.org) in Marathi language. WP consists of two volumes. Volume-I (129 pages) presents the Achievements & Prospects part. Project-wise details regarding Time & Cost Overrun are given in Volume-II (794 pages). This article is a quick & preliminary response & thus, has obvious limitations. In-depth analysis will take some more time. Point-wise brief comments are only given here.

As only to be expected, WP is absolutely silent about the alleged irrigation scam in Maharashtra. It does not take the cognizance of the reports of various committees [Vadnere, Mendhegiri, Kulkarni, Upase, etc] constituted by WRD, GoM to enquire into the charges of corruption & irregularities. It keeps mum about the allegations made by RTI (Right to Information) activists, politicians & media. Though the whole attempt appears to be to not bring any "inconvenient truth" on record, the argument in WP is full of lame excuses & unwarranted, uncalled for & unnecessary explanations. Such excuses for delays and cost escalations have already been rejected by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG). Points of investigation like accuracy of costs, claims of escalations, water-availability reports and violations of Maharashtra Public Manual and other norms have not been addressed.

The WP is more like a status report as CM had said and that it is not a white paper, a white paper is supposed to be a result of wide consultation with key people.

But one thing is clear. The usual engineering arrogance is missing & irrigation-bureaucrats are on defensive. That is a good omen for water sector, to say the least!

In order to prove its innocence WRD, GoM in this WP points fingers at other departments / organizations in Maharashtra (Public Works Department, Maharashtra Jeevan Pradhikaran, Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation, City and Industrial Development Corporation, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation) & even uses examples from other States in India (AP, Karnataka, Goa, Gujarat). It claims that schedule of rates of Maharashtra is on lower side as compared to that of said departments & the States. It also cites examples of gigantic Lift Irrigation Schemes (LIS) in other States to justify unviable & controversial LIS in Maharashtra. WP gives lots of procedural details regarding project formulation & implementation which the critics, activists & media people already know very well. In fact, it is they who have pointed out the violations in the procedures & have filed petitions in the courts of law.

WP also presents voluminous project-wise data in Volume –II. Its accuracy & hence, credibility has already been questioned & a steady flow of reports bringing out discrepancies have started appearing in media. Knowledgeable & generally reliable sources from WRD, GoM confirm the trend & predict a flood of RTI applications in this matter in very near future. Pandora's Box has been opened.

WP presents a roadmap of water resources development in Chapter -9. It suggests that in order to avoid thin spreading of funds, projects on which expenditure incurred is less than 25% may at

present be suspended & projects in advanced stage of completion may only be completed on priority basis. This has generated a serious political controversy. People from backward regions (Marathwada, Vidarbha, etc) feel that this move may further increase regional imbalance. They complain that expenditure incurred is less because adequate funds at proper time have not been given in the first place. Some analysts, however, point out that the said suggestion is a clever move to divert attention from charges of corruption & irregularities.

There are also rumors that smart officers under the guidance of even smarter politicians have reported inflated figures of expenditure (greater than 25%) in some of the projects to safe guard their interests. Truth may prevail in due course of time through RTI.

On this background, an attempt is made in accompanying table to present comments on some of the issues discussed in Volume –I of WP. The comments are self explanatory & perhaps, speak volumes. It is sincerely felt that WRD has lost an opportunity of introspection. Absence of soul-searching makes white paper an exercise in futility.

Comments on White Paper on Irrigation in Maharashtra

Organizational Structure of WRD WRD, GoM is a top-heavy organization with 3 Cabinet Ministers, 3 Minister of States, 2 Secretaries, 5 Executive Directors, 2 Director Generals, 21 Chief Engineers & 67 Superintending Engineers.

Expenditure on establishment WP is silent about other establishment (Exec Engr to Junior Engr & supporting staff) & total annual expenditure of complete establishment & its percentage as against expenditure on works.

Conflict between Direct Class I officers (Exec Engr and above) & others is one of the reasons of WRD's poor performance. Powers have been concentrated in the hands of Direct Class –I officers & actual experience of work on site, barring exceptions, is mainly with the officers below the rank of Executive Engineers. Indifference towards grass root level functionaries & subordinate engineers has taken its toll.

Administrative Approval Para 3.3 gives information regarding empowerment in respect of Administrative Approval. It suggests that more autonomy was given to Irrigation Development Corporations on demand from opposition parties & as per Governor's directives. Alleged misuse of that autonomy has, of course, not been discussed.

Sec 11F of MWRRA Act, 2005 The latest decision of bringing in MWRRA – an independent regulatory authority- in the process of Administrative Approval is noteworthy, in absence of any reference to Sec 11F of MWRRA Act, 2005 & Integrated State Water Plan (ISWP). ISWP was supposed to be ready within six months from the date of bringing in force the said Act. MWRRA has been sanctioning projects even in absence of ISWP which, prima facie, appears to be a violation of MWRRA Act.

Irrigation Management Irrigation Status, Water Auditing & Benchmarking reports officially published by WRD don't substantiate tall claims made in WP.

Rapid appraisal of performance of WUAs (including those under MWSIP) recently done by a reputed NGO brings out the sorry state of affairs in respect of Participatory Irrigation Management. The NGO has sent its report to the authorities & has demanded joint inspection of WUAs. WRD & MWRRA, so far, have not accepted that challenge.

It is claimed that Maharashtra is the only State where the recovery of water tariff is more than Operation & Maintenance expenditure. If WRD does not provide adequate funds for M&R (Maintenance & Repair) to all projects, its expenditure will always appear to be less. M & R scenario in the State is reflected in the Overall Project Efficiency which is hardly 20-25% as against 41-48% assumed in the design.

Reforms in Water Sector Amount of arrears of water tariff is approximately Rs. 1000 Crs. The percentage recovery of irrigation tariff is hardly 12-13% & that of non-irrigation is 45-50%. Can this situation be described as satisfactory?

Contrary to the general impression the reality about the so called reforms is as given below:

1. Rules have not been framed in respect of Maharashtra Irrigation Act,1976 (MIA 76) even after 36 years.
2. No formal decisions have been taken regarding most of the recommendations of Maharashtra Water Irrigation Commission Report,1999
3. State Water Policy adopted in 2003 has not been revised after 5 years as was supposed to be done in 2008. Though the priority of water use has been changed (irrigation now gets second priority instead of industry), it has not been implemented in actual practice. Basin/sub basin-wise development & management of water resources still remains to be done. Issue of regional imbalance is very much alive. Current controversy regarding release of water for Jayakwadi project from upstream projects speaks volumes about the actual implementation of water policy & water laws.
4. MWRRA has virtually become ineffective for all practical purposes because following remains to be implemented even after 7 years of its existence:
 1. Irrigation Development Corps to act as River Basin Agencies & issue water use rights
 2. Preparation of ISWP by State Water Board under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary
 3. Approval of ISWP by State Water Council under the chairmanship of CM
 4. Approval to new projects by MWRRA with reference to ISWP
 5. MWRRA to carry out its legal responsibility towards backward areas & removal of regional imbalance.
6. Agreements within WUAs & delineation of WUAs for LIS under MWSIP as per MMISF Act,2005.

Economic Aspects This chapter is surprisingly very brief. It deals mainly with various liabilities like balance cost of tenders, land acquisition, resettlement, NPV, etc. Total liability as reported is Rs.31742 Cr. The picture is incomplete due to lack of following information:

1. Yearwise funds available from all sources (State budget, central assistance, World Bank ,Bonds issued by Irrigation Development Corporations, etc)
2. Yearwise expenditure done under various heads wrt sources of funds.
3. Norms & actual cost of potential created in per ha & per M cum terms
4. Irrigation Development Corporation wise information of 1, 2 & 3 above. (There are complaints that though budget provision is made, funds are not actually released accordingly and /or funds are diverted mid course giving some excuses)

MERI MERI has successfully used applications of remote sensing in water sector. But the irony is management wing of WRD has failed to take advantage of MERI's work. MERI studied silting in live storage of 44 projects & prepared revised capacity tables. Management authority in 41 projects simply did not take cognizance of the study & did "management" & prepared even water audit report without considering effects of silting.

Waghad The Waghad project in Nashik district is an exception, the real credit of success story at Waghad goes to WUAs & people's participation. WRDs' efforts, if any, to replicate Waghad can hardly be described as sincere. Praise Waghad, showcase it & conveniently forget about its lessons is the strategy adopted by WRD since long.

Time & cost overrun WRD has given an impressive list of factors (of course, excluding corruption) which according to WRD contribute in time & cost overrun:

1. Statutory Clearance regarding issues related to forest, wild life, environment
2. Land acquisition
3. Resettlement
4. Inadequate funds
5. Time required to prepare detailed designs
6. Changes in scope of projects
7. Increase in schedule of rates
8. Escalation in prices of land
9. Increase in royalty charges

10 Increase in establishment charges

However, starting projects without land or approvals is illegal as per CAG. This comment takes care of many points listed above. It appears that lack of good governance in WRD has taken its toll. In absence of ISWP, it is free for all & might is right in water sector. Organizational & procedural changes appear to be urgently called for.

Important decisions taken - & reforms WRD had to take following decisions which in itself is an indirect admission of charges of corruption, irregularities & inordinate delays:

1. Land acquisition on priority basis.
2. Submit detailed estimate for administrative approval only after carrying out detailed survey, investigation & design
3. To initiate process of tendering only after land acquisition
4. Not to pay mobilization & machinery advances
5. To restrict the use of tender clause-38

Potential created & utilized The WRD is not in a position to conclusively prove on paper that development has really taken place thanks to the non-measurement of area irrigated. Readers are requested to study the details presented in Reference 2 & 3 in this respect. Scientific evidence to arrive at certain percentage of increase in area is not available. WRD itself is to be blamed for this situation.

Roadmap There is nothing new in most of the points suggested in this chapter.

- Maharashtra Water & Irrigation Commission, 1999 had given at least 7 specific recommendations regarding the priority of completion of ongoing / incomplete projects. Those were to be implemented within one decade i.e. by 2009. Nothing has happened.
- State Planning Board had suggested a way out in 2007. WRD ignored that practical advice.
- Roadmap suggests that drip irrigation may be made compulsory for perennial crops. There is already a specific provision in this respect in MWRRA Act, 2005. Why that was not brought in force?
- The fact that WRD had to give a suggestion regarding reduction of financial powers of Irrigation Development Corps speaks volumes.

References:

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