

Business Standard- 21- September-2021

# A new water policy for India

**O**n November 5, 2019, the Ministry of Jal Shakti set up a committee to draft a new National Water Policy (NWP). The earlier NWPs of 1987, 2002 and 2012 were drafted entirely within the government system. This is the first time that the government decided to set up a committee of independent experts to draft the policy. I had the great honour and privilege of being asked to chair the 2019 committee. The members of the committee included the country's leading water experts from diverse backgrounds, including those who have held key positions within government in the past, as also professionals from academia and civil society.

The committee held 16 meetings over the period of one year. It heard and received 124 submissions by experts, academics, practitioners and stakeholders. This included submissions by governments of 21 states and 5 Union Territories and 35 presentations and submissions by departments and ministries of the Government of India. What we found truly remarkable is the striking consensus in perspectives and suggestions across the spectrum, from central and state governments to stakeholders from outside government. There appears to be a clear recognition that the water crisis we face today is truly unprecedented and that we need to rapidly move towards a new paradigm of water management and governance that reflects both the emerging realities on the ground, as also the growing understanding of water in the 21st century.

As a committee we were heartened by a very similar recognition being repeatedly articulated from the highest echelons of government. The president of India, writing in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic,

said: "Respect for nature may be the next lesson intended for us. Faced with an extraordinary crisis, most people tend to be selfish, but this is a crisis that teaches us to think equally of others. Nature is reminding us to acknowledge, with humility, our quintessential equality and inter-dependency." In a similar vein, the vice president has said: "Let us accord prime importance to protect Mother Nature, re-orient the development models and consumerism-driven lifestyles. We are living in an inter-connected world and cannot continue with business-as-usual approach in the quest for development and modernisation as every action impacts the environment."



**WATER: REFORM OR PERISH**

MIHIR SHAH

These statements have immediate and far-reaching implications for water policy. Ever since Independence, our water policy has been dictated by a "command-and-control" approach towards nature. This is inherent in the larger development paradigm that has failed to adequately recognise that the economy is but a small part of the larger ecosystem. What we need to acknowledge is the profound inter-connectedness and inter-dependence that characterises the world we live in and to be humble in our approach to natural systems, showing them the respect they deserve and recognise that *prakriti rakshati rakshita* (Nature protects those who protect her). The new NWP has also been guided by five key water reforms enunciated by the prime minister: (a) the need to break down the silos into which we have divided water; (b) respect for the immense diversity of India while planning for water; (c) greater focus on management and distribution of water; (d) higher priority to recycling and reuse of water; and (e) raising

people's awareness and people's participation in management of water.

We concurred with the suggestion of the minister for Jal Shakti that unlike the water policies of the past, the new NWP should not end up as just a token statement of pious intentions, looking good on paper but not getting translated into action on the ground. Thus, the new NWP spells out both specific strategies, as also definite time-lines, within which key provisions of the policy would be implemented. In addition to the usual practice of placing the NWP in the public domain to receive feedback from the people, the minister for Jal Shakti has proposed that different aspects of the NWP should also be discussed threadbare in a series of open workshops with stakeholders concerned with those specific aspects of the policy, before the Government of India takes a final view on the NWP drafted by the committee of independent experts. According to established procedure, the final approval of the NWP, of course, rests with the National Water Resources Council, which is chaired by the prime minister and includes all chief ministers as members.

Even as this process unfolds, through a series of weekly articles over the next one month, I will place before the readers, key provisions of the new NWP and the thinking behind including these elements in the policy. I will also try to highlight aspects of the policy that represent a significant departure from the past, why these departures were considered important and how exactly these are proposed to be implemented on the ground. It is my sincere hope that this background will enable stakeholders who participate in the consultations around the policy, to gain a prior and deeper understanding of the approach, principles, thrust areas and direction proposed by the new NWP.

*The writer is Distinguished Professor, Shiv Nadar University. He chaired the Committee to draft the new National Water Policy set up by the Ministry of Jal Shakti in 2019*



The Tribune- 21- September-2021

# Himalayan crisis looms large in Lahaul valley



JAI PRAKASH NARAIN

FORMER REGIONAL OFFICER, WHO

Any destruction of our environment in the name of development will only be at the expense of our ecology and human welfare. We should adopt development models that put people's health and well-being before economic progress and profit. Lahaul-Spiti is blessed with abundant sun and wind energy sources spread across an area of 11,000 sq km. As a global leader in solar energy, India should make maximum use of these renewable energy sources.

IN October last year, the Lahaul valley of Himachal Pradesh was thrown open to the rest of India. The Prime Minister inaugurated the Atal Tunnel at Rohtang, thereby opening the valley which until then had remained cut off from the outside world for nearly six months every year. It was a game-changer and a moment of celebration for the local population. The joie de vivre was, however, short-lived. The residents are now concerned about their survival.

The disquiet originates from the recent approval for the construction of many hydropower projects in the valley. There are fears that the fate of Lahaul will be similar to that of Uttarakhand and Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh, given the similar terrain, fragile strata and ecology.

These fears are not entirely unfounded as the tragedies due to disasters are increasingly occurring in the Himalayan states, claiming lives and causing hardships. The warning bells are ringing loud and clear in the Lahaul valley and the future looks uncertain and ominous.

Who can forget the Kedarnath floods of 2013 that reportedly killed at least 5,000 people? In the aftermath of the Kedarnath disaster, the Supreme Court halted the development of hydroelectric projects in Uttarakhand, pending a review by the Ministry of Environment. The Chopra Committee set up by the ministry later concluded that 23 of the 24 projects proposed would have an 'irreversible impact' on the ecology of the region. Similar events, albeit with variable impacts,



PERILOUS: HP needs to revisit its over-dependence on hydropower projects. FILEPHOTO

have been a regular occurrence in Uttarakhand, including Chamoli district, where a massive ice and rock avalanche killed over 70 people in February this year.

On August 11, a landslide occurred at Nugalasari in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh, killing at least 28 people, all buried under the debris, including passengers travelling in a state transport bus and a couple of cars. A similar accident in Batseri, also in Kinnaur, happened when big boulders fell on a tourist bus killing nine people, including eight tourists.

Such events are both unprecedented and highly dangerous. A fallout of human activity, they are taking place without any warning, and in greater frequency. Tragically, these events not only kill people indiscriminately but also bring untold misery and econom-

ic disaster for the simple and hard-working people living in peace and harmony with nature.

Why are these happening so regularly and what are the root causes? Can these be warning signals for the Lahaul valley? The major reasons include the construction of hydroelectric power projects and unscientific road expansion. According to the Geological Survey of India, indiscriminate blasting of mountains to build infrastructure and highways has, by destabilising the earth's soft strata, rendered the fragile areas more susceptible to landslides and floods.

The construction of these projects in the Lahaul valley has become lucrative to the private sector as transporting of heavy machinery has now become easier thanks to the opening of the Atal Tunnel. There is widespread concern

among people in the valley that these hydropower projects if implemented will adversely disturb the fragile and pristine ecosystem with grave consequences for the local population.

Clearly, these are man-made tragedies and have similarities in their root causes. Experts identify them as insufficient risk management when commissioning the developmental projects and undervaluation of environmental costs in decision-making, as well as climate change.

Considering the gravity of the situation, the Himachal High Court had appointed the one-man Shukla Committee over a decade ago to study the issue at the ground level. The committee, in its report, recommended an immediate moratorium on the construction of new hydroelectric projects in Himachal Pradesh, in particular Lahaul-Spiti. Despite this, there has not been any follow up on the Commission's recommendations and the hydropower projects continue to be approved and commissioned.

What is the way forward? The first step is to realise that these hydropower projects are a threat to ecology and humans. Therefore, disasters and tragedies, including in places such as the newly opened Lahaul-Spiti district, having a similar topography and vulnerabilities, must be prevented at all costs.

While renewable energy remains a high priority for India, as articulated by the Prime Minister recently, sources such as solar, wind and hydrogen should be exploited rather than hydroelectric power. The govern-

ments must ensure that the people are placed ahead of profit.

Moreover, Lahaul-Spiti is blessed with abundant sun and wind energy sources spread across an area of 11,000 sq km. As a global leader in solar energy, India should make maximum use of these enormous renewable energy sources. It's high time the state government too recognises this potential and revisits its over-dependence on hydropower projects which, evidence clearly shows, are detrimental to human lives in the hilly terrains. In view of all this, various hydroelectric power projects should be halted immediately.

Secondly, the construction of roads and highways should be designed and carried out using modern technology that is eco-friendly and not based on blasting, which destabilises the earth's strata in the Himalayas.

Thirdly, applied research is needed to assess the risks and the population's vulnerability to development projects; monitor ecological changes going forward; and identify appropriate local and policy-based mitigation measures. The role of social institutions and communities is critical in this regard.

Finally, in the interconnected and interdependent world that we live in today, the quality of our lives and our survival depend entirely on water, air, food etc. Any destruction of our environment in the name of development will only be at the expense of our ecology and human welfare. We should adopt development models that put people's health and well-being before economic progress and profit.

The Tribune- 21- September-2021

# World Bank okays ₹1,168 cr aid for Shimla water supply project

To be completed by 2026 | State to provide ₹657 crore

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

SHIMLA, SEPTEMBER 20

The World Bank has finally approved a financial assistance of \$160 million (Rs 1,168 crore) for the Shimla Water Supply and Sewerage Service project.

The lengthy negotiations concluded today and now Shimla residents can look forward to 24x7 water supply and effective sewerage services in the next few years. The project will be completed by 2026.

"The negotiations with the World Bank and the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) concluded today. I am happy to disclose that negotiations concluded successfully. The World Bank has agreed to provide \$160 million for the project," said Rajneesh,



Secretary, Urban Development, who headed the negotiation committee of the state.

"The date of effect for the project will be January 1, 2022. Shimla residents can hope for 24x7 water supply in the next two to three years," he added.

Urban Development Minister Suresh Bhardwaj said that the project would surely see the light of the day.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

- Augment water supply to Shimla from the Sutlej with additional 67 MLD to meet the demand up to 2050
- Bulk water supply to Shimla peri-urban areas to meet the demand of the Special Area Development Authority (SADA) at Kufri, Shoghi, Ghanahatti and additional planning areas up to 2050
- 24x7 supply to domestic and commercial consumers in the Shimla MC area. Improved sewerage services in the municipal area
- Replace the distribution pipe network in the Shimla MC area and upgrade it to a 24x7 supply system

"The World Bank will soon start releasing funds for the project. Once it is completed, Shimla will not have to worry about water supply and sewerage service for the next couple of decades," he added.

The project that aims to provide 24x7 pressure water supply and improve and augment sewerage services in and around the city has a total financial

outlay of \$250 million (Rs 1,825 crore). Of the total amount, the World Bank will provide \$160 million (Rs 1,168 crore) while the state government will borne the remaining \$90 million (Rs 657 crore). Rajneesh said the Urban Development Department managed to secure funding from the World Bank despite fiscal constraints due to Covid-19.



Rajasthan Patrika- 21- September-2021

# नीति नवाचार: महिला सशक्तीकरण में भी मिशन का बहुमूल्य योगदान खुली किताब की तरह है जल जीवन मिशन

मि जोरम में ल्वांगतलाई, जम्मू-कश्मीर में कुपवाड़ा, गुजरात में कच्छ और निकोबार द्वीप समूह एक-दूसरे से इतने दूर हैं और देश के चार कोनों में स्थित हैं, फिर भी इनमें एक बात समान है। ये सभी सीमावर्ती इलाके देश में जल जीवन मिशन (जेजेएम) की सफलता के प्रतीक बन गए हैं। कश्मीर से केरल तक जल जीवन मिशन लोगों के जीवन की वास्तविकता बन चुका है। ऐसी वास्तविकता, जिसका सपना लोगों ने 70 वर्षों से देखा, लेकिन साकार दो वर्ष से भी कम समय में किया गया।

यह सफर तब शुरू हुआ था, जब प्रधानमंत्री ने लालकिले की प्राचीर से पहली बार कहा था कि देश में कोई भी घर ऐसा नहीं रहेगा जो पानी के पाइपों-नलों से न जुड़ा हो। यहीं से जल जीवन मिशन का बीजारोपण हुआ। 'मन की बात' में उन्होंने जल को परमेश्वर और पारस के तुल्य बताया। उन्होंने कहा कि जल जीवन मिशन की टीम जल पहुंचाने का काम करके परमात्मा को घरों तक पहुंचा रही है, जो मानवता की सेवा है और एक दिव्य कार्य है। फिर दो वर्षों के कठिन परिश्रम और पूरी लगन के साथ काम करते हुए भारत के 8.12 करोड़ यानी 42.46 प्रतिशत घरों में नल चालू



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हो गए। 78 जिलों, 930 प्रखंडों, 56,696 पंचायतों और 1,13,005 गांवों में नलों से जल आपूर्ति शुरू हो गई है। ये आंकड़े अचम्भित भी करते हैं और उत्साहित भी।

भारत के लोग आज सिर्फ आंकड़ों से प्रभावित नहीं होते और इसकी वजह यह है कि आजाद भारत के 74 वर्षों में उन्होंने तमाम नीतियों रास्ते से भटकते हुए, योजनाओं को लोगों के जीवन के बजाय बजट के कागजों पर ही उतरते हुए देखा। भारतवासियों की आंखें विश्वसनीय और प्रामाणिक देखने के लिए तरस रही थीं। जल जीवन मिशन इस कसौटी पर खरा उतरा है। मिशन के डैशबोर्ड पर कोई भी अपने इलाके में रोज लगाने वाले कनेक्शन के बारे में वास्तविक

मिशन के डैशबोर्ड पर कोई भी अपने इलाके में रोज लगाने वाले कनेक्शन के बारे में वास्तविक समय में जानकारी ले सकता है। लोग देख सकते हैं कि प्रगति वास्तव में हुई है या नहीं।

समय में जानकारी ले सकता है। इसके अलावा पानी की गुणवत्ता का अद्यतन विवरण, निर्मित जल संसाधनों की संख्या तथा गांव में जल उपयोगकर्ता समुदाय के सदस्यों और तकनीशियनों की जानकारी भी यहां मौजूद है। मिशन ने पानी की गुणवत्ता की जांच के लिए जो नियम बनाए हैं और जो संवेदी उपकरण लगाए हैं, वे विश्वस्तरीय हैं। एक पंक्ति में कहा जाए, तो जल जीवन मिशन एक खुली किताब की तरह है, जिसे लोग देख सकते हैं, उसका आकलन कर सकते हैं और राय बना सकते हैं कि प्रगति वास्तव में हुई है या नहीं।

महिला सशक्तीकरण में भी जल जीवन मिशन का बहुमूल्य योगदान रहा है। मिशन ने महिलाओं को

अत्यावश्यक पेयजल लाने के लिए लंबी-लंबी दूरियां तय करने की समस्या से मुक्ति दिला दी है। साथ ही सामुदायिक स्तरों पर महिलाओं को अग्रणी भूमिका निभाने का अवसर मिला है। महिलाओं को गांव एवं जल स्वच्छता समितियों में सदस्य बनाया जा रहा है, जिनमें 50% सदस्यता महिलाओं के लिए ही आरक्षित होती है। महिलाएं गांव में पेयजल आपूर्ति योजना की रूपरेखा तैयार करने से लेकर कार्यान्वयन, प्रबंधन और संचालन में सक्रिय भूमिका निभा रही हैं। हर गांव में पांच महिलाओं को जल की गुणवत्ता पर पैनी नजर रखने की जिम्मेदारी दी गई है। कई महिलाओं को प्लम्बर, मैकेनिक, पम्प ऑपरेटर का प्रशिक्षण भी दिया गया है।

एक अनूठे अध्ययन 'मेमेटिक्स' में इस ओर ध्यान दिलाया गया है कि कुछ विचार दरअसल 'लिविंग यूनिट्स' की तरह काम करते हैं, जो पुनरुत्पादन करते हैं, कभी-कभी बस स्वयं को दोहराते हैं, कभी-कभी अच्छी तरह से विकसित होते हैं और फिर बहुत जल्द जिस दुनिया में वे रहते हैं उसे एकदम से बदल देते हैं। हर घर को एक कार्यात्मक या चालू नल से जोड़ने के विचार भी ऐसा ही है, जो हर घर में नल से जल की सुविधा के जरिए देश में बड़ा बदलाव लाएगा।