

FARMERS' PARTICIPATION IN WATER MANAGEMET OF IRRIGATION PROJECTS

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India is Agriculture dependent country. About 70% Indians are dependent on agriculture. Due to untimely rains farmers' have to face many problems and challenges. To overcome these challenges successive governments have implemented many large, medium and small irrigation projects and spent thousands of crores of Rupees on these projects. However, many of these projects are under utilised.

Farmers are NOT even aware of the kind of money spent by the government to provide the irrigation facilities to their lands. There is absolutely no discipline in the water usage. The farmers in the beginning

of the canals are over using the water. The farmers at the end of the canal are deprived of their share. Excessive use of water is making the soil to loose its fertility.

In the major irrigation projects, farmers do not stick to their delivery schedule of water release also they do not make use of the available water during the nights. This leads to 40% wastage of water. Also, the lift irrigation method has to be replaced with the drop irrigation method. This would result into much more savings of the water. This surplus water can be utilised for irrigating more lands and crop production increases many folds.

Farmers do not any knowledge or the information about the suitable crops, suitable species or correct farming methods and techniques. The government has to find the solutions for all these challenges faced by the farmers by regularly conducting high level brain storming session along with the participation of farmers, agricultural scientist and department officials. Participation of the farmers is very essential in such workshops.

Participation of farmers in irrigation related issues is not new thing in India. If you turn the pages of the history, even in the British Raj, there are many instances, where in after building of the irrigation projects, the distribution of water and maintenance was handed over to farmers themselves. There are instances; where-in farmers themselves equally distributed the expenses involved in distributing water to their lands. Presently, in the major irrigation projects, there is a huge participation

of the farming community. In the irrigated areas, the water distribution and management of water resources is happening with greater involvement and participation of farmers under the auspicious of the co-operative societies.

The Karnataka Irrigation Act has authorises the Water Users Co-operative societies to monitor and collect the water tax from the users. The societies have all the freedom to fix the rates for water usage as per the crop grown by the end user. In the catchment areas, there are Water Users' Co-operative Societies for every 500 Hectares. Initially, these societies take care of repair and maintenance of the canals. Then, after the agreement with Irrigation Department / Corporation, these canals are handed over to the Irrigation Department / Corporation for water supply. Based on the crops grown by the each farmer and the water required for each crop, the societies have to submit their total water requirement to Irrigation Corporation. The Irrigation Corporation would charge Rs.12/- for every 1000 cubic metre water released. The society has the responsibility of distributing this water as per the request raised by each farmer for their various crops. The societies will not be having any power to charge less than what government charges. However, societies are authorised to charge higher prices as per the prices fixed at the Annual General Meeting of the Society. Out of the Water Tax thus collected, the societies are authorised to retain 20% for their expenses and maintenance. The balance, they can submit to the government or the Irrigation Corporation. In addition, the societies can also retain Rs.40/- per hectare for repair and maintenance of the canals coming under their

catchment area. The government offers 2% incentives to the societies, who pay the water tax within the stipulated time.

If the societies collect Rs.120/- per hectare from the farmers, then that society becomes eligible to get the special incentives of Rs.540/- per hectare from the Central Government and Rs.540/- from the State Government. Hence, the total incentive available per hectare is Rs.1080/- which is sanctioned by CADA (Command Area Development Authority). Thus collected total amount would be deposited in DCC Banks in a joint account of Societies' Secretary and Land Development Officers. The society's expenses would be covered with the interest earned by this deposit. CADA also pays the Society membership fees of the SC and ST farmers coming under the society. All these resources would help running and operations of the society. It also strengthens the co-operative attitude among the farmers.

For the success of the farmers' participation in the water distribution and the water management, the office bearers of the Water Users' Cooperative Societies have the higher responsibility. Societies have been empowered with the authority of the government and its officials. If the societies use this power diligently, then the co-operative movement in Water users association would be a great success in Karnataka.