



Public Lecture
On
"Water Scarcity in Delhi - Soaring demand or Mismanagement?"
7th August, 2012,
India Habitat Center, New Delhi

1

Toxics Link in Collaboration India International Centre cordially organized a public lecture on "Water Scarcity in Delhi - Soaring demand or Mismanagement?" on 7th August 2012 at India International Center. The lecture began with a screening of a film titled 'Water Ignites Life and Hope'; a film by TERI that takes look at the grim water scenario in the country.

This was followed by a panel discussion moderated by **Mr. Satish Sinha** (Associate Director Toxics Link). The panelist included eminent speakers like **Mr. A.K Bajaj** (Former Chairman, Central Water Commission), **Mr. Himanshu Thaakar** (Coordinator of South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People) and **Mr. Manu Bhatnagar** (Environmental planner, heading the Natural Heritage Division at INTACH).

Mr. Sinha welcomed the panelist and threw light on the worsening situation of water across the city and attributed it largely to mismanagement within the system. He pointed that 40% of the water is actually wasted in the distribution system itself primarily due to leakage. While there are areas across the city which are grappling with scarce water supply and fundamentally depend on water tankers.

Throwing light on the rapid urbanization of the country, **Mr. Bhatnagar** pointed that urban settlement in Delhi was also rapidly increasing and more urbanization meant increased water needs. He said that there are numerous norms set out for water supply in the city which set out standards as to how much water a person needs per day. The most useful norm he pointed is that of the Central Public Health Organization that states 172 liter per person per day. Taking this as a standard for planning, Delhi needs approximately 1000 million gallons of water per day. And the city is getting 830 million gallons per day as indicated by Delhi Jal Board (DJB) data.

Thus, according to this estimation the city has what is required and that it only needs to maximize this fixed amount of water. One way of doing it was by bringing down the leakage which amounts to 40%. He further stated that in countries like Cambodia, Singapore and France the leakage amounts to just 5%.

Expressing concern on the diminishing ground water Mr. Bhatnagar explained that whenever rainwater proves deficient, the city recourses to pumping ground water in an attempt to supplement the scarcity. This in turn is depleting the aquifers which serve as a buffer in times of crisis and are the only internal source of water for the mega city. Also, he urged for the need to revive the blue areas across the city which are the only gateway to the aquifers and emphasized on the need to have rainwater harvesting at the community level, campus level as well as individual level. He further noted that different arms of the government were not working in consort, but going at their own pace and direction. DDA has its own master plan where there is no space for water harvesting and ground water recharge.

Throwing light on the bleak water scenario Mr. Bhatnagar pointed that it was more a question of management and the authorities alone cannot be blamed. The common thinking is that increase in supply can solve the crisis and one way of increasing the supply is by building more and more dams. However, there is a need to curb the profligacy. In his opinion the residents of the city were equally to be blamed for wasting millions of gallons of water and suggested that they should curb the demand.

Mr.A.K Bajaj on an optimistic note shared that if we go by 172 lt per capita per day then Delhi obviously has the right amount of water resources needed to feed the entire population.

Commenting on the 40 % wastage, he explained that the water is actually not being wasted rather it is going back to the system and thus the total water availability remains the same. He further pointed that 85% of the water supplied by Delhi Jal Board was everyday getting back to the rivers or underground aquifers, if not as water then as sewage mixed with water.

Briefing on privatization of water he shared that in its attempt to solve the predicament of water scarcity the government tried to privatize water but to no avail. DJB has tried to supply water for 24 hours through projects like the Sonia Vihar plant; by collaborating with foreign companies. However bringing foreign companies into play means good financial backing making water much more costly. Further, he pointed that water privatization has failed in several countries like Vietnam, Philippines. Even in India; state like Karnataka resorted to water privatization which however collapsed.





He suggested that recycling of water could help in reducing the crisis. Water after use should be retreated and brought to the level of drinking water quality. Singapore is a famous example of this and they have even named it as 'new water,' which in turn is helping to alleviate the water crisis. Treatment of sewage and waste water is also one of the issues which the DJB has taken on a serious note. He also pointed that one of the major challenge faced by DJB is that it is unable to treat the huge amount of sewage generated in the city however; he said that all these issues are being taken care of.

He stated that the DJB is endeavoring to improve the distributing system the government realizes what was proper and what needs to be done. Water system in Delhi was laid during the British time and the same system has become corroded and there is lot of leakages. He further emphasized that the DJB needs to overhaul the network of the city's

underground water supply system which at places dates back to the 1930s and is in a decrepit condition.

While **Mr. Thaakar** pointed that the crisis lay both in soaring demand and mismanagement. He said that **50%** population of Delhi doesn't get even 50 liter water per capita per day. And there are people who don't even get 20 liter per capita per day. He also shared some facts about an RTI filed against DJB where it was asked about the number of *jugi jhopris*, slums, unauthorized colonies rural villages and urban villages across the city and the water supplied to them. The DJB claimed that they supplied 30-35 gallons per capita per day, which comes to 140 lt per capita per day. Whereas paradoxically most of them don't get any regular supply and largely depend on hand pumps and tankers for water supply.

He further revealed some important facts about the upcoming Renuka Dam and said that Delhi was pushing hard for the dam and hoped to get all its water. Ironically the center has declared it as a national project, before the project has any environmental clearance, forest and wildlife clearance, clearance from CEA, central water commission, planning commission and before it has the sanction of the people who will be affected by it .Despite the absence of all these clearance it has been declared as a national project and 90% of the fund is going to come from the centre.



Talking about the water mismanagement in the city he said that the mismanagement is deeply entrenched and the situation is likely to worsen. He further pointed that Delhi was a privileged city and is setting a wrong example in terms of water management. He noted that none of the Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) were working even at 50% of their capacity. The city does not harvest rain, lacks in ground

water management, does not protect its water bodies and lack equity in water supply despite the fact that the city draws water not only from Yamuna but also Ganga and Sutlej. He further added that the city has destroyed one of the biggest rivers –the Yamuna and neither does it protect its floodplain nor Ridge- one of the most valuable environmental resource of Delhi.

Talking about water privatization, he said that despite the huge protest against the privatization the city is again attempting at it. Pointing the dangers of privatization Mr. Thakker shared that the private parties are there to make profit and the profit will increase in proportion to the revenue collected. For every additional revenue they collect they get more money thus, for private parties it is easier to generate more revenue by giving more water to the people who are consuming more. In the absence of any credible regulatory system and credible grievance redressal mechanism, introducing privatization would ensue further menace.

Expressing concern on the bleak scenario Mr. Thakkar said that there was no improvement in the state of affairs and the situation is likely to worsen with the growing population and rising demand. He emphasized on the need to make the DJB work in a more transparent, democratic, accountable and participatory manner and advocated for the need to reduce the huge inequities in water supply. He further pointed the need for credible regulatory system and credible grievance redressal mechanism.

Mr. Sinha in his closing remark thanked the entire panelist for their valuable insight and said that water bodies, rivers, river basin and the whole ecological system needs to be regenerated and revived. Briefing on the pollution of the river Yamuna he said that a study carried by Toxics Link found that the vegetables grown on the Yamuna bank had high percentage of heavy metal like lead and cadmium.

The lecture saw an overwhelming response and the audience actively participated in the lecture. The participants expressed grave concern on the absence of any planning dimension and space dimension in the system of water management. Concerns were also raised on the absence of any recycling and rainwater harvesting system. The audience also expressed grave concern on inequities in water supply; on the mechanism required to improve participation and governance. Also some pertinent questions were raised on the pollution of the river Yamuna; industrial water pollution, metal contamination.



More than 30 participants participated in the lecture which included representatives from School of Planning and Architect, Educational and Research Institutes, Universities, Media houses, and Civil Societies.



Environment and Health Public Lecture Series

Water a driver of nature and a major source of survival is fast dwindling. Delhi, a home to more than 16 million populations is grappling with dismal water situation. People across the city wait for irregular and inadequate water supply; others wait for water tankers to supply water while many go without water for days.

Ground water is fast depleting rapidly while the river Yamuna a victim of the onslaughts of mankind, is clogged with garbage, sewage and industrial effluents. Flood plains are being lost and the river is being exploited. The situation is grim and precarious as the mega city largely depends on other states like Haryana and Uttarakhand for much of its Water Supply. However, how far these states can sustain the supply is uncertain.

All this pings down to the vital question of why water crisis? Is it the increasing demand with increasing population, or poor management and mishandling?

It is in this light that Toxics Link and India International Centre cordially invites you to a film screening and a panel discussion on "Water Scarcity in Delhi - Soaring demand or Mismanagement?" The film 'Water Ignites Life and Hope' by TERI takes look at the grim water scenario in the country.

Program:

'Water Ignites Life and Hope', a film by TERI

Panel discussion:

Speakers:

- **Himanshu Thakkar**
(Coordinator of South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People)
- **Manu Bhatnagar**
(Environmental planner, heading the Natural Heritage Division at INTACH)
- **A.K Bajaj**
(Former Chairman, Central Water Commission
Consultant in the Water Resources Sector
Vice President, International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage.)

Moderated by Satish Sinha, (Associate Director,
Toxics Link)

Venue: Conference Room I, India International Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi

Date: Tuesday, August 07, 2012 **Time:** 6:30 pm

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