

Session 2:

Equitable water distribution in the context of IWRM: Conceptual issues and cases

Equitable water distribution is one of the neglected areas in the IWRM discourse – both in policy and practice. Also the understanding about equity differs considerably as per the interests or the location of the different stakeholders. Thus there is a need to evolve and internalize certain common understanding around the issue of equity so that more equitable arrangements could be made in water allocation and distribution. The objective of this session is to bring more conceptual clarity with regard to equitable water distribution and its different dimensions, to develop certain common understanding around equity and also equip the participants to analyze water sector issues from an equity point of view. Thus the session would try to uncover the different dimensions of equitable water distribution like the bases of inequity; equity in access to water and equity of processes or equity in participation; different understandings of equity and equitable distribution (equitable distribution of water within the command or service area of a project, equitable distribution of water in proportion to the land the issue of tail ender deprivation, rotation from tail to head, per capita water allocation and so on); equity and right based discourse and the different dimensions of right to water; equitable water distribution-livelihoods linkage; assessment of livelihoods and the corresponding water needs through the biomass route; equity in practice – what could be done?; the water sector reform and the equity question (for example tradable water rights); and so on. The session would end with a few illustrative case studies drawn from the participants themselves.

Thus the session would include the following:

1. Shift from equality to equity: what does it mean?
Equality means a demand for a radical, egalitarian social transformation, for structural changes in society. Equity refers to what is immediately possible and practicable *without* a radical restructuring of social relations. In other words, it refers to and demarcates the space that is still available within the system.
2. Two types of inequities:
 - historically disadvantaged sections on the basis of class, caste, patriarchy, ethnicity, minorities, etc. One's location in all these would by and large decide one's access to resources, including water.
 - spatial or locational disadvantages emanating from the bio-physical characteristics of water. There is asymmetry in the relationship between the upstream and the down stream. In the context of watershed development the asymmetry works in favour of the downstream people because the people in the upper reaches have no real control over this process and the people in the downstream get most of the increased water resources (especially groundwater). In the case of irrigation command areas, the asymmetry works in the reverse.

The head reach farmers can control the flow going to the tail-end portion of the command and the tail-enders do not have any control over this process.

3. Equity and right based discourse:

- Right to water, water rights – both are very distinct and different concepts> Right to water is more in the line of creating access to water as part of the equity agenda and with a view to create water security for all and so on. Water right is more in the context of irrigation water and it is more in the nature of tradable entitlements using market instruments.
- Broad dimensions of right to water
- scope (quantity and quality requirements, accessibility and affordability and so on)
- duties and responsibilities
- ownership, delivery, pricing (state, market, social vs. economic good)
- relationship with other rights
- macro/global developments that impact on content and the working of the right
- The basic issue is “ensuring a social minimum to all”

4. Right to water:

- Presently what does it include?
 - water for basic needs
 - basic needs often defined in terms of water for drinking, cooking, and hygiene
 - o 40 lpcd in rural areas; 100-140 lpcd in urban areas (in the case of India)
 - o WHO norm is 100 lpcd
 - o though there is no explicit mention of right to water (in terms of basic needs) rights like right to life, health and so are supposed to include this
- What about water for livelihood activities?
 - divided opinion as to whether human right to water should be extended to water for livelihood activities or not

5. Equity, livelihoods and water:

Here the efforts would be to demonstrate a methodology to estimate the water required to meet livelihood needs of people involved in agriculture as their main occupation

- Issue of estimation of water needed for livelihood needs
 - Study a livelihood pattern, and determine how much water is needed directly and indirectly to ensure livelihood needs
 - One way of estimation is through biomass because biomass in different forms (seed, food, fuelwood, fodder, recycled, etc) is the major indirect (virtual) water use in rural livelihoods. One can broadly

work out how much biomass is required to meet various needs of a family

- The one can try to work out the water required to produce this biomass assuming certain productivity of water

6. Two overarching questions:

- should right to water (including water for livelihood needs) be in terms of a fixed allocation (expressed in quantitative terms)?
- can equity be legislated? or should it be allowed to play out through contestation?

7. Equity: in practice what could be done:

- Newly created or incremental resource to be shared equitably
- De-linking land rights and water rights and linking it to livelihood needs:
 - Ensure minimum water service for livelihood needs to all on affordable terms irrespective of landholding
- Basic service and economic service
- Positive discrimination: Favour those bearing the brunt of the inequity due to class, caste, ethnicity, gender, location
- Ensure inter-sectoral equity: water use prioritisation
- Ensure rightful prior rehabilitation of project affected, and also explore options which reduce submergence and displacement
- Provide women with preferential access to water both for domestic and productive uses
- Equal opportunity or space for participation in decision making and management or governance functions (especially in the institutions)

7. Illustrative case studies form different countries