

# **Allocation of Water among Different Water-Use Sectors in Sri Lanka: Lessons of Experience**

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# Allocation of Water among Different Water-Use Sectors in Sri Lanka: Lessons of Experience

## Abstract

The problem of water allocation among the sectors has emerged as a growing problem in Sri Lanka, warranting immediate policy intervention for the sustainable and most feasible utilization of the tapped water resources. The water allocation problems (surface and groundwater) in the past were addressed via both *ad-hoc* and systematic procedures by the relevant stakeholders. However, it has been reported that allocation mechanisms have resulted in many problems of co-ordination and conflicts. Many countries including neighbouring India have legally enacted water policies to address the issues of water resources planning, development and management. More specifically water allocation priorities during the periods of water scarcities and arrangement for adjudication of water disputes and the established institutional arrangements to solve the water conflicts are well in placed based on the national water policies of the many countries. A serious limitation in Sri Lanka is the absence of an institutional arrangement for conflict resolution. Present scenario provides clear advantages to the powerfully vested interests at the expense of the rural farmer whose rights have not been secured through a clearly enunciated water policy.

Findings of the three case studies indicate that, re-allocation of existing water shares is socially, culturally, economically and politically very sensitive. Any intervention should be made in participatory bottom up approach and proper interagency coordination from the initial stages of the project with the participation of all relevant stakeholders is vital aspect to achieve the expected goals. Although the involvement of civil society as the 'watchdog' in some instances has granted untold benefits to the society, this phenomenon has caused lot of burden and inconveniences to the economy as well as hindered or delayed the efforts of improving welfare of the people. The basic reason for the protest and hindrances is lack of correct information and awareness on the true situation of the projects and it's out come. Lack of integrated and multi objective planning of available water resource seriously affect fair and equitable access to water for different users and lead to conflict and other side effects in allocation of water.

The expected water scarcity to be developed in irrigated agriculture through the abstraction of water for drinking purpose has been substantially reduced in the past by the improvement of irrigation infrastructure, adoption of water saving management practices such as rotational water issue and implementing cropping calendar and change of the attitudes of farmers from habitual water usage.

Rejection of compensation payment by farmers in lieu of their irrigation rights in Kalthota irrigation scheme after experiences gained in couple of seasons is a clear example to show the influence of social and cultural values in a peasant society which surpass the realized economic gains.

Kirindi oya irrigation and settlement project (KOISP) is a clear example of non-recognition of the multiple uses of land and water resources at the basin level. Promotion of intensive method of livestock rearing through conducting training and awareness programme and supply of hybrid animals to the beneficiaries have the ability to reduce tension between livestock farmers and crop cultivators. Intensive methods of livestock rearing become inevitable with the augmentation of KOISP under Menik ganga diversion project, which is expected to create more competition for land and water.

The research recommends the following for the sustainable management of water resources of Sri Lanka. Water allocation priorities during scarcities should be established in consultation with all water user groups and the agreed priorities should be set up and legalized as in many other countries in the region. Water resources management legislation should be enacted to integrate the existing piecemeal legislations and to establish an apex body for inter-sectoral coordination and decision making in the water sector. Measures are necessary to improve the irrigation efficiency, reduce the water losses in drinking water supply schemes (unaccounted water) and losses in hydropower generation (transmission losses).