

ARTICLE : RIGHT TO WATER: A CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM FOR CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS IN AND AROUND MADURAI, TAMILNADU, SOUTH INDIA

I. The issue: Water is life. In India, issues relating to water have become so complicated and confusing that some say no government can change things and we must expect continuing deterioration. Indian laws on water are inadequate; water-basin planning and regulation are practically non-existent. The pricing of water is far below cost in almost every use; but the poor have little access to enough good water for life and livelihood. Ground-water levels in India have declined enormously in cities as well as rural areas and yet there is no ground-water regulation while agricultural procurement prices encourage changes in cropping patterns to more water intensity. There is no regulation of water, or of private supplies by tankers. In rural India, women and children walk miles to collect water. In urban India, the water quality in slums is poor. An important reason for high-school drop-out rates is the collection of water by children.

Water for life means delivering clean water, removing waste water and providing sanitation. Without these tasks being adequately performed, people and especially children fall ill (with diarrhoea among other diseases), and die. In 2004, of 60 million deaths worldwide, 10.6 million were of children below five years. The principal cause was poor water and sanitation. Developing countries had 5 billion cases of diarrhoea in children below age five each year, of which 1.8 million died. This is more than the deaths from tuberculosis or malaria. In India, 450,000 died from diarrhoea, avoidable if they had access to better water and sanitation. Even a small improvement in water and sanitation (for example, open latrines versus pit-latrines, not even flush-latrines) has a significant impact on reducing these deaths. An important reason for girls not going to or dropping out of school is lack of privacy in sanitation and a lack of water even if a toilet exists. Pollution of water supply by public urinals and defecation is common.

The United Nations Development Project published the first Human Development Index in its Human Development Report of 1990 points out that in the world today, 1.1 billion are without access to safe water and 2.6 billion people have no access to sanitation. Almost all those affected are among the poorest in their societies. There will be 800 million without access to water and 431 million without sanitation. India is on track to halve the numbers without access to safe water, but not so for sanitation.

Children pay the highest price for an unhygienic world where over 1 billion people struggle without safe water and a staggering one in three lacks even a basic toilet. Ordinary diarrhoea sickens more children under five than any other illness, killing 4,500 children every day (the second highest single cause of child deaths) and pushing many times that number to the very brink of survival. Major social needs such as education are closely linked to safe water and hygiene. Waterborne diseases sap children's energy and ability to learn. "Waterborne illness kills a child every fifteen seconds and underlies much of the world's disease and malnutrition," UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman said in New York. "Solutions to the world water crisis must ensure that children survive, thrive, learn and live in dignity".

The realization of the right to water as a 'human right' to be promoted and protected and sensitization civic action groups in general to the problems of environmental health is still generally low on the agendas in developing India. The human right to water is indispensable for

leading a life in human dignity. The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses. An adequate amount of safe water is necessary to prevent death from dehydration, to reduce the risk of water-related disease and to provide for consumption, cooking, personal and domestic hygienic requirements.

Article 11, paragraph 1, of the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2002 specifies a number of rights emanating from, and indispensable for, the realization of the right to an adequate standard of living “including adequate food, clothing and housing”. The use of the word “including” indicates that this catalogue of rights was not intended to be exhaustive. The right to water clearly falls within the category of guarantees essential for securing an adequate standard of living, particularly since it is one of the most fundamental conditions for survival. The right to water is also inextricably related to the right to the highest attainable standard of health (art. 12 of the Covenant)¹ and the rights to adequate housing and adequate food (art. 11). Article 12 of the above covenant proclaims the need to promote environmental hygiene, as an aspect of the right to health, which encompasses taking steps on a non-discriminatory basis to prevent threats to health from unsafe and toxic water conditions. For example, States parties should ensure that natural water resources are protected from contamination by harmful substances and pathogenic microbes.

The right to water has been recognized in a wide range of international standards including treaties, declarations and other standards. The need to respect the right to water and to promote a public ethos of ‘water right-First’ should be an obligation of civil society groups and the civil society groups cannot shun this social and ethical responsibility. People from all walks of life in India should be made aware of right to water as a human right and their adult responsibility in protecting and promoting this right. Knowing the urgent need for initiating an action plan for creating awareness and dissemination on the ‘right to water’ among civic action groups, namely farmers’ associations, Co-operatives, women’s groups, self help groups (men and women), rural youth clubs/Associations, Residents’ welfare associations, grassroots level NGOs, political groups and College NSS volunteers and Youth groups in schools in rural and urban areas in India, K. Amirthalingam) proposes to launch a capacity building programme for civil action groups in and around Madurai, Tamilnadu India., keeping in view the following objectives:

II. Objectives of the initiative:

- To provide a conceptual understanding and awareness of the ‘right to water’ as a human right for civil society groups as proclaimed in various United Nations international treaties, declarations and other standards .
- To arouse social consciousness among civic action groups on their role-responsibilities in the promotion and protection of the right to water.
- To build competencies among the members of civil societies as to the application of various intervention strategies at the grassroots level among those individuals and groups who have been traditionally facing difficulties in exercising the right to water.
- To design and develop communication materials in local language and to apply media interventions in the capacity building programs.

- To network with agencies involved in water rights campaigning and action programs at the local, national and international levels.

III. Profile of Initiative

- Capacity building and training sessions for civic action groups
- Designing and developing communication materials and media interventions in education and awareness training programs
- Public awareness campaigns on right to water (Marches, Street meetings, street plays, human rights chains, rallies, commemoration Day etc.,
- Networking with local and international organizations
- Advocacy work in the water and sanitation
- Documentation and Reporting

The beneficiaries will include NGO administrators, School children's forums, Teachers' and parents' associations, farmers' associations, Co-operatives, women's groups, self help groups (men and women), rural youth clubs/Associations, Residents' welfare associations, grassroots level NGOs, political groups and NSS volunteers and Youth groups in schools in and around Madurai, Tamil Nadu, South India. Preference will be given to children's and youth groups in this project.

In the initial phase of the project, a course syllabus for the capacity building program on the Right to water for the Civil Society groups will be prepared in English and in local language, which will contain the units of lesson, methodologies used and learning expectations of the participants. The syllabus will cover major units of lesson namely 1.What is right to water? 2. Right to water as a human right 3.Environmental health rights with a focus on water, hygiene and sanitation 4.Water pollution and water borne diseases 5.The Right to water in International Human Rights Law 6. Human rights based approach to development 7.Basis water requirements 8.UN Covenants and conventions guaranteeing right to water and sanitation 9.National Legislations on the Right to water 10. Communication applications for promoting water rights 11. Role of advocacy in the promotion and protection of right to water 12.Role of civil societies in water advocacy work 13.State parties obligations and Obligations of actors other than state parties etc.

The methodologies will include lecture sessions, group discussions, poster exhibitions, seminars, debates, puppet shows, participatory learning exercises and games etc. In addition, various informational materials will be prepared for circulation to the civic action groups. Both community based and centre based education and training sessions will be conducted for the target groups. Before the start of each capacity building and training a water Rights survey will be undertaken to study the knowledge and understanding of the participants. A post evaluation study will be conducted at the end of each program.

Media interventions become an important strategy in sensitizing the participants as to the right to water. Both traditional and modern methods of communication will be used in all education and awareness building programs. The Centre proposes to organize seminars, discussions, poster

exhibitions, competitions, rallies, fellowship programs focusing on various issues and concern concerned with right to water.

WATER ACTION ALERT: With a view to awakening public consciousness about the , it is proposed to initiative efforts to send ‘ACTION ALERT’ to NGOs, Schools and parents, local governmental organizations, elected representatives of the parliament and legislative assembly, places of worship, workplaces, newspapers, magazines on a regular basis. The media of Action Alert will include posters, post card, leaflet and tracts, post cards, newsletters letters and memoranda.

Exchanging information through Electronic and non-electronic networking with agencies involved in the promotion and protection of the right to water at the national, Regional and international level is an important project activity, which our centre will undertake. It will generate and disseminate information about relevant issues at the local level through Internet, Newsletter, child rights bulletin, leaflets, booklets etc.

IV. Expected Results:

By the end of each of the training program, the participants will have learned to a) clarify terms and concepts of the right to water as a Human right b) understand the global and local conditions for the right to water c) make use of the knowledge to analyze the issues connected with water rights and apply the values and principles embedded in the environmental health rights d. Members of civic action groups become conscious of the right to water and its ramifications e. Better understanding of water rights issues and concerns f. Increased participation of members in rights based program of activities g. increased member participation in civil society organizations in rights based approach to environmental health at the community level. h. Strengthening of civic action groups through exchange of information and their participation in networking i. Increased participation of youth and women in talks on the right to water as a human right j. increased awareness on the adults’ responsibility of protecting and promoting the right to water.

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