

THIRTY NINTH REPORT
MINISTRY OF WATER RESOURCES
DEMANS FOR GRANTS
(2002-2003)

[Action taken by the Government on the Recommendations/
Observations contained in the Thirty-Fourth Report]

CHAPTER I

REPORT

This report of the Committee on Agriculture deals with the action taken by the Government on the recommendations contained in the Thirty-Fourth Report (Thirteenth Lok Sabha) of the Standing Committee on Agriculture (2002) of the Ministry of Water Resources which was presented to the Lok Sabha on 23 April 2002 and laid in Rajya Sabha on 24 April 2002.

1.2 Action taken notes have been received from the Government in respect of all the 17 recommendations contained in the Report. These have been categorised as follows :-

- (i) Recommendations/Observations that have been accepted by the Government (Chapter – II of the Report)

Recommendation Nos. 2,3,7,9,12,13,16 and 17

Total - 8

- (ii) Recommendations/Observations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the Government's replies (Chapter – III of the Report)

Recommendation No.5 and 11

Total - 2

- (iii) Recommendations/Observations in respect of which reply of the Government have not been accepted by the Committee (Chapter – IV of the Report)

Recommendation Nos. 1,4,6,8 and 10

Total - 5

- (iv) Recommendations/Observations in respect of which final replies of the Government are still awaited (Chapter – V of the Report)

Recommendation Nos. 14 and 15

Total - 2

1.3 The Committee will now deal with the recommendations which have not been accepted and have been included in Chapter – IV of the report.

A. LESS ALLOCATION FOR 2002-03

Recommendation No.1

1.4 The Committee had noted that although the Ministry of Water Resources had proposed a plan budget allocation of Rs. 1,063.82 crore for the year 2002-03, but the allocation of only Rs. 550 crore was approved by the Planning Commission for the Ministry. This allocation worked out to be approximately 20% more than the Revised Estimates of Rs. 450 crore in 2001-02 and was almost 50% of the amount proposed by the Ministry. According to the Ministry, the reduced Plan outlay of Rs 550 crore would mainly restrict the Ministry to initiate new/pipeline schemes, namely (i) Command Area Development Programme; (ii) Pagladiya Dam Project; (iii) Flood Control in Brahmaputra Valley; (iv) Critical anti erosion works in Ganga Basin States and Critical anti-erosion works in coastal and other than Ganga Basin States. The Committee were of the view that the above schemes which mainly related to Flood Control Sector and Command Area Development Programme were very important and critical to water management in the country and deserved topmost priority.

The Committee had, therefore, strongly recommended that the Planning Commission and Ministry of Finance should increase the Plan allocation of the Ministry adequately at the Revised Estimates stage so that the new/pipeline schemes as listed above were initiated fully in this year itself.

1.5 The Ministry of Water Resources in their reply have stated that the Government, the Planning Commission and Ministry of Finance have already finalized the annual Gross Budgetary Support to the Ministries. Depending on the progress of expenditure, the Government would review the additional requirements to Ministry of Water Resources at Revised Estimates stage; and, in doing so, would keep the recommendations of the Standing Committee in mind. Copies of letters received in Ministry of Water Resources from Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance and Planning Commission in this regard are placed at Annexures I and II.

Comments of the Committee

1.6 The Committee are not satisfied with the reply of the Ministry. It has been stated in the reply that depending upon the progress of expenditure, the Government would review the additional requirements of the Ministry of Water Resources at the Revised Estimates stage and in doing so would keep the recommendations of the Committee in mind. However, on perusal of the Planning Commission's letter to the Ministry of Water Resources annexed (Annexure-I) with the reply, the Committee find that the Ministry is yet to prepare schemes for the approval of the competent authority in respect of flood control in Brahmaputra Valley, critical anti erosion works in Ganga Basin States and restructured Command Area Development Programme. In this connection, the Planning Commission have rightly expressed their apprehension that allocation of higher outlays in 2002-2003 may result in blockage of development funds in schemes which are not ready for implementation. The Committee wonder as to how the Ministry expect additional allocation of funds, when certain schemes are yet to be submitted to the Planning Commission for approval. In their opinion, if the Ministry are

really serious about getting higher allocation, they should chalk out detailed proposals with regard to the above schemes and seek the approval of the Competent authority at the earliest. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommend that the Ministry should expeditiously forward the proposals for approval of these schemes, so that they can justifiably ask for higher allocation from the Planning Commission for the new/pipeline schemes to be initiated at the earliest.

B. On going projects

Recommendation No.4

1.7 The Committee had found that a whopping number of 159 Major, 242 Medium and 89 ERM projects were pending for completion in various States. They were highly distressed to find that as many as 44 Major & 10 Medium projects were pending since the Fifth Five Year Plan.

A sum of Rs. 8007 crores had already been released up to the end of year 2001-02 under Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP) for completion of pending projects. The Committee were constrained to note that only 20 projects were likely to be completed by end of Ninth Plan and during Tenth Plan 39 number of on going projects may be got completed. The Committee were dismayed at the very slow rate of completion of the projects and felt that it did not justify the huge investment made under the programme. There was a strong need for strengthening the monitoring machinery of these projects.

The Committee had therefore, recommended that the Ministry should intensify monitoring of projects under AIBP and persuade the State Government concerned to earmark more funds for projects which were nearing completion.

The Committee had further recommended that completion of the pre-fifth plan projects should be given top priority and all the projects under AIBP be completed at the earliest.

1.8 The Government in their reply have stated that the Ministry of Water Resources shares the Committee's concern about slow rate of completion of AIBP projects by the State Governments. Ministry of Finance issues the Central Loan Assistance sanction to the State Governments under AIBP on the basis of recommendations made by Ministry of Water Resources. Government has released CLA of Rs.8480 crore (Rs.8007 crore for normal projects and Rs.473 crore for Fast Track Programme) till 30.12.2002. The Ministry of Water Resources has taken following steps to monitor AIBP Projects:

- (a). Central Water Commission, the technical arm of Ministry of Water Resources, monitors the projects covered under AIBP and based on this, the funds are released.
- (b). Ministry of Water Resources convenes periodical meetings to review progress of projects.
- (c). Secretary (WR) has requested Chief Secretaries of States to expedite early completion of pre-Fifth Plan Projects.

Ministry of Water Resources has noted the Committee's concern. It shall strengthen monitoring of AIBP implementation further, as desired.

Comments of the Committee

1.9 The Committee are not satisfied with the reply of Government. Expressing serious concern over slow rate of completion of pending irrigation projects despite huge investments made under AIBP, the Committee had recommended that the Ministry should intensify monitoring of projects under AIBP and persuade concerned State Governments to earmark more funds for projects nearing completion. The Committee are unhappy to find that notwithstanding the assurance of the Ministry to strengthen the monitoring of AIBP implementation, no concrete steps have been spelt out in this regard. The Committee would like the Government to take the issue of incomplete irrigation projects seriously. For this purpose, they desire that the Central Government should take up this matter with State Governments at the highest level. The Committee would like to be apprised of the concrete action taken by the Ministry on the above recommendation within three months of presentation of the report.

The Committee further find that Ministry have not responded adequately to the Committee's recommendation that completion of pre-Fifth Plan projects should be given top priority. Merely requesting the States to expedite completion of pre-Fifth Plan projects is not enough. The Committee desire that the Ministry should go into reasons for delay in each project under the pre-Fifth Plan and extend all-out assistance to States, both technical and financial, so that they are completed expeditiously and in a given time frame.

C. COMMAND AREA DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation No.6

1.10 The Committee had taken a serious note of the fact that for Command Area Development (CAD), out of Rs.187.19 crore provided in BE (2001-02), a sum of Rs.71.06 crore which came to 40% of B.E. was diverted to other activities. Subsequently to reduce the gap, savings made in other schemes of the Ministry upto Rs.33.00 crore were utilized for CAD programme. The Committee had disapproved of such adjustments and had recommended that sums allotted for a particular programme should be spent on that programme only, instead of diverting them to other schemes/programmes.

1.11 The Government in their reply have stated that the concerned State Governments execute various works under the Centrally Sponsored Command Area Development Programme. Utilisation of funds provided for the scheme in the Plan Budget of Ministry of Water Resources depends on the physical/financial progress made by the State Governments. Keeping in view the trend of expenditure upto September 2001, Ministry proposed RE of Rs.146.39 crore as against the BE of Rs.187.19 crore for this programme while sending RE proposals to Ministry of Finance. However, the Ministry of Finance further cut down plan budget of Ministry of Water Resources by Rs.50 crore at RE stage. Since the expenditure under CAD Programme upto September 2001 was only 14% of the BE, share of cut had to be passed on to the CAD Programme as well. As such, there was no diversion of CAD Programme funds to other activities.

The expenditure under CAD Programme picked up during the latter half of the year and they were able to meet the requirement of CAD Programme by re-appropriation of savings from other schemes. The Ministry did provide the final requirements of Rs.148.27crore to the CAD (against RE of Rs.115.53 crore), by permissible internal adjustments during FY 2001-02.

Comments of the Committee

1.12 The Committee are not convinced with the reply of the Ministry. They feel that enough exercise was not done by the Ministry before projecting the revised estimates to the Planning Commission in respect of the Command Area Development Programme. As a result, the Ministry had to go in for unnecessary adjustments and re-appropriation of savings from other schemes. The Committee, while reiterating their disapproval to such adjustments, desire that the Ministry should in future project more realistic revised estimates for various programmes after conducting a detailed exercise on the requirement of funds for the various programmes/schemes during the year.

D. Minor Irrigation

Recommendation No.8

1.13 The Committee for the last 3 years had been continuously recommending for urgent approval and implementation of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme 'Participatory Management for Rehabilitation & Management of Minor Irrigation Project'. They were, however, dismayed to find that the scheme was still to be approved by the Planning Commission. The need for giving impetus to revival of old irrigation methods had been recognized by one and all as the most economical and surest way to have sustainable source of water. This was also one of the thrust areas of the Ninth Plan.

The Committee were informed that the Planning Commission while giving comments to the EFC proposal intimated that funds had not been tied up for the scheme and it could be done only after financial resources position for Xth Plan becomes clear. The said scheme had now been included in a comprehensive scheme 'Command Area Development' and 'Water Management' and would be repropose to the Planning Commission for approval and funding. The Committee would like to be enlightened about the reasons as to why funds for such a vital programme which was a thrust area of the Ninth Plan were not tied up during the whole of the Ninth Plan leading to avoidable delay in approval of the scheme. The Committee had therefore, strongly recommended that the scheme should be repropose to the Planning Commission at the earliest and concerted efforts be made to get its approval without any further delay.

1.14 The Government in their reply have stated that the Ministry of Water Resources in 1998 prepared a Centrally Sponsored Scheme- "National Project for Rehabilitation and Management of Minor Irrigation Scheme" at an estimated cost of Rs.1000 crore which was submitted to the Planning Commission for inclusion in the 9th Five Year Plan. The Planning Commission expressed their inability to support the above scheme and suggested that the Central funds available under various employment generation

programmes could be pooled for rehabilitation and modernization of minor irrigation. Ministry of Water Resources again took up the matter with the Planning Commission in May 2000 conveying the views of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture that the scheme of Minor projects may be reviewed and the specific allocation for the recast scheme, estimated for an amount of Rs.760 crore, may be made. In response, the Planning Commission gave 'in principal' approval for the proposed centrally sponsored scheme and an EFC memo for the scheme had been framed and sent to the Planning Commission in January 2001 for comments. The Planning Commission intimated that the allocation for the scheme would be considered only after the budget allocations of the 10th Plan are firmed up. This component has been included in the proposed comprehensive centrally sponsored scheme 'Command Area Development and Water Management' for the 10th Plan.

Comments of the Committee

1.15 The Committee are not satisfied with the reply of the Government. The Committee had shown their displeasure at non-approval of the centrally sponsored scheme 'Participatory Management for Rehabilitation & Management of Minor Irrigation Project' during the whole of Ninth Plan period, particularly when the development of minor irrigation was the thrust area in Ninth Plan. The Committee had recommended that the scheme be re-proposed to the Planning Commission at the earliest and concerted efforts be made to get its approval without further loss of time. The Committee are unhappy to find that even after 3 months of making the recommendation, no concrete action appears to have been taken in this regard. The Ministry has not mentioned about the scheme which has been re-proposed to Planning Commission, stage of approval of the scheme, and efforts made by them for its early approval.

The Committee, therefore, strongly reiterate that the Ministry should vigorously pursue with the Planning Commission the issue of early clearance of the scheme and apprise the Committee of the efforts made in this regard.

E. DECLINING GROUND WATER LEVEL

Recommendation No.10

1.16 The Committee had noted with serious concern the rapidly declining ground water levels in various parts of the country. They were constrained to find that the Government were not addressing adequately to the gravity of the problem. The Government did not have any national policy on underground water so that the water level could be restored or improved specially in areas where ground water level had shown alarming decline. The pilot central sector scheme on 'Studies on Artificial Recharge of Ground Water' being implemented in some parts of the country had shown encouraging results but in spite of this, Planning Commission had not approved it as a full-fledged Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

The Secretary (WR) during evidence admitted that since the ground water recharge scheme was only on pilot basis, enough funds were not being made available to the States for undertaking scheme on ground water recharge.

The Committee were at a loss to understand the delay on the part of Planning Commission to approve the scheme which was so urgent and vital to the human existence. The Committee had been strongly recommending in its various reports earlier that this scheme should be cleared without any further delay and implemented urgently. The Committee had once again recommended that early clearance to the Centrally Sponsored Scheme on 'Artificial Recharge of Ground Water' should be given by the Planning Commission so that it could be taken up on a large scale in order to arrest the declining trend of ground water level in various parts of the country.

The Committee had also noted with concern the cases of arsenic poisoning of ground water in West Bengal. They had desired the Ministry to find some effective solution to this serious problem.

1.17 The Government in their reply have stated that the National Water Policy adopted in 1987 has been revised in 2002. This Policy emphasizes need for regulating exploitation of ground water resources so as not to exceed the recharging possibilities.

In consideration of the responses received from the State Governments to Central Sector Scheme of "Study of Recharge to Ground Water" under IX Plan, the Ministry has reformulated the scheme at an estimated cost of Rs.150 crore, which is under process. The details of the new Central Sector Scheme are being finalized and will be submitted to Planning Commission for approval.

Governments, both at Central and State level, are taking several actions to mitigate the problem of Arsenic pollution in groundwater. These include-

- a). Construction of new spot replacement tubewells in 8 arsenic affected districts,
- b). New Piped Water Schemes under 1st /2nd Phase Action Plan in Nadia, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Haora and Murshidabad.
- c). Construction of shallow sanitary dug wells.
- d). Arsenic Removal Plants for existing Piped Water Schemes.
- e). Tubewell based Mini-piped Water Supply Schemes under normal programme in arsenic affected blocks of 8 districts.
- f). It is also constructing Arsenic-free tubewells to assist PHED, Govt. of West Bengal.

The following long-term measures have also been taken:-

- a). Joint plan of action with UNICEF for quicker identification of contaminated sources through community participation.
- b). Central Ground Water Board has taken up artificial Recharge Programme on pilot basis to dilute the arsenic contaminated ground water.
- c). Piped Water Supply Scheme for tapping arsenic free surface water in the districts of Malda, South 24 Parganas & North 24 Parganas.

Comments of the Committee

1.18 The Committee are highly perturbed over the lackadaisical approach of the Ministry in getting the approval of very vital and strategic scheme of Artificial Recharge of Ground Water despite its pilot scheme showing encouraging results

during the last 10 years. The Committee have now been informed by the Ministry that they have reformulated the scheme for submission to the Planning Commission for approval. The Committee are apprehensive that this process may lead to further delay in approval and implementation of the scheme. Since the scheme has already been delayed inordinately, the Committee desire that the Planning Commission should consider clearing the reformulated scheme on a priority basis and making the funds available urgently so that the nationwide programme for 'Recharge of Ground Water' could be taken up at an early date.