

A Paradigm Shift in Water Resource Management in India

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India is currently engaged in a paradigm shift in water resource management. For too long India has depended on creation of large water storages as an end in itself regarding these as a panacea for its water requirements. Allied to this has been a strategy of deep drilling of borewells that defined India's Green Revolution. Today, both these strategies are facing a mid-life crisis. While the gap between capacity creation and utilisation in large reservoirs continues to grow, water use efficiency languishes way below potential and those displaced constitute a vast human tragedy. Groundwater today constitutes the main source of both irrigation and drinking water. But water tables everywhere are plummeting and water quality is endangered.

A new approach is called for and is being devised. For one, the emphasis is shifting in large-scale irrigation from construction to management, with empowerment of water users and improved water efficiency. Focus is also being placed on participatory aquifer management to promote sustainable use of groundwater. Industry is committing to greater use of recycled water and urban areas are to focus on cutting-edge sewage treatment systems

All of this is to happen within a new legal and institutional regulatory framework, with new groundwater legislation, a new regulatory authority bill and a new water framework law, given the sensitivity around the constitutional status of water in India.