

PERSPECTIVES ON WATER MANAGEMENT

(Syed Hashim Ali — An Interview)

The Government spends huge sums on creating irrigation facilities but does not bother to spend a little more to maintain field channels with the result that there is no optimum utilisation of the irrigation resources. India can easily multiply its food production four times by better water management practices says Mr. Syed Hashim Ali, Secretary Command Area Development Department, who is closely associated with the introduction of the *waarabandi* system of irrigation under the Sriramsagar project in Andhra Pradesh. He says universities should offer courses in water management. Even the Irrigation Department codes do not specify the task of maintaining, in good condition, field channels.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) recently decided to set up a separate secretariat for field-level water management at its headquarters in Rome, and he was one of four experts, with practical experience in utilising water for agricultural purposes, who advised this step.

The operational efficiency of irrigation projects in the country is generally below 50 percent. The tail-end of almost every irrigation channel has either inadequate or unreliable water supply. On the other hand, there is over irrigation and avoidable wastage at the head of the channels, he adds.

It is necessary to keep separate the operation and maintenance aspects of an irrigation project, from the stage of construction itself, as suggested by the Government of India. He says it may be necessary to appoint a chief engineer in charge of utilisation to deal with the engineering and operational aspects of

water management and command area development.

The present practice of trying to provide engineering solutions involving capital expenditure to organisational, administrative and operational problems of irrigated agriculture should change. Coordinated administrative and management measures have yielded good results in other countries and should pay dividends in India too, he feels.

Mr. Hashim Ali explains that the designing of irrigation projects in the country is done in isolation by the engineers, except for some formal consultation with the Department of Agriculture. All necessary expertise has not been mobilised to deal with the problems of water management.

There has been a welcome shift in emphasis from land development in the Fifth Plan to water management in the Sixth Plan. The accent is now on the conveyance of water to the very heart of each land-holding at project cost and on the introduction of the "*waarabandi*" system for equitable distribution among the farmers he notes. The field-channels are the capillaries of irrigation, he explains. With better water management and the application of modern agriculture technology, countries like Japan, Korea and Israel produce more per unit, using less than one-fourth the volume of water used in India.

In Japan the average yield of paddy is 6 tonnes per hectare, while in India it is just 1.8 tonnes. With an intensive agriculture programme in the command areas of Andhra Pradesh, the yield has been raised to four tonnes per hectare, he points out

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