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Better water use patterns in Tungabhadra basin urged

Meet discusses ways for inclusive water management.

Our Bureau

Bangalore, April 17 Farmers, Government officials, scientists and NGOs engaged in improving water use patterns in the Tungabhadra basin have called for improved water management and cropping techniques to cope with two looming problems: inter-State disputes on resource use and the problems arising out of climate change.

A two-day workshop – organised by the Society of Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM), Pune; Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore; and the UNESCO Centre for Water Law, Policy and Science, Scotland – which concluded here on Friday, addressed various aspects of water policy.

The issues arising out of transfer of managerial control from the irrigation bureaucracy to water users' associations; the willingness of

farmers to accept higher prices for water; and the possibility of adopting new farming practices in the case of water-intensive crops such as paddy, sugarcane and orchard were discussed at the event.

Dr Peter Mollinga of the Centre of Development Research, University of Bonn, who has studied water use in the Tungabhadra basin, observed that farmers are willing to pay more for water but also wanted a greater say in managing the resource. But the Government is unwilling to let go of its control over water distribution, he said.

“A situation where villages at the tail-end of an irrigation network are deprived of their due share has persisted for years,” Dr Mollinga said.

Service area concept

Mr Suhas Paranjape, member of SOPPECOM, said: “There can be some improvement in the distribution of water only when water rights are delinked from land ownership. The concept of command area should change to one of service area, so that the livelihood needs of populations with little or no land are also factored in.”

Dr Dale Campbell of UNESCO said: “Water rights should be clearly defined for user associations to bring about a positive change in distribution of water.”

The stakeholders discussed the need to improve cropping patterns and techniques as central to making some headway on inter-State sharing of water. It was observed that as the Tungabhadra dam was conceived as a drought-mitigation project, the cultivation of rice and sugarcane should not have been encouraged.

“There is a wealth of innovative farming practices, some of which involve organic methods. Small farmers do not have the staying power to manage the transition period in such cases. Here, initiatives such as NREG can play a role,” Mr K.J. Joy of SOPPECOM observed.