

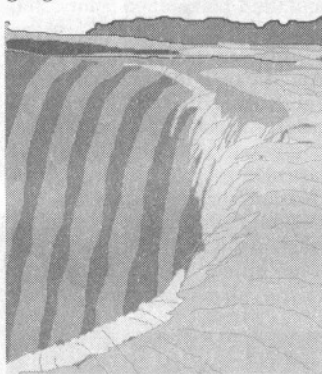
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PEOPLE are worried. Newspapers are screaming. Political (read military or military-appointed) managers are looking around for solutions. A drought is persisting into the fourth dry, life-drenching year.

Pakistan is in the grip of a water crisis. Attempts at an agreement between riparian provinces on how to share the scarcity brings out still unsettled issues despite the so-called "water accord".

into evaporation ponds in the Cholistan desert. Serious environmental hazards are evident in the area with salinity steadily advancing onto the nearby fertile lands.

Sindh already has a massive problem of salinity and waterlogging. The Left Bank Outfall



And how could it be otherwise? Corruption is rampant in the institutions responsible for water management in the country. Starting from the federal ministry of economic affairs, planning commission, federal ministry of water and power, the notorious Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and its various research institutions and an army of local and foreign consul-

tants, to the provincial irrigation and drainage authorities (PIDAs), institutional decay is evident. All equity has been routed out of the system. Tail-enders do not get water.

But then it is also worth asking what has the National Drainage Programme (NDP) achieved. Pakistan accepted \$785 million in loan money for the NDP from a consortium of donors led by the World Bank. It was conceived as an umbrella programme with a massive research input by scores of national and international consulting firms expressly to overcome the various problems and issues of sustainability in the world's largest contiguous irrigation system. WAPDA and the World Bank assured everybody that this is the cure for the system. Pakistan took the bitter pill despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of Pakistani technical experts were totally against the undertaking.

Four years down the road we find the same problems aggravated to a greater degree. This is despite the fact that we have spent substantial amounts of loan money on hundreds of projects to improve the environmental performance of the system. But then it is also very much understandable for we did use parts of the NDP loan for desilting of canals and procurement of imported machinery which is now rusting, lying useless at countless places with the PIDAs.

We also used that money to dig new drainage channels that have been choked before draining the lands even for a single season. Institutional reforms are still in their infancy. Independent studies show little hope of improvement through the suggested model now being tried in a pilot phase on one canal command in each of the provinces.

The NDP has indeed not changed anything save the nomenclature of the institutions involved. A major justification

for the NDP was that it would ensure that the system recovers its operations and maintenance costs. But costs are still ahead of revenues. The SCARPs are the main culprits, eating into over 50 per cent of all budgetary allocations for irrigation. But we are still importing inappropriate technologies for drainage that have failed in the IBIS in the case of SCARPs. Ironically, the NDP itself is funding disinvestment of the earlier SCARP projects on the one hand and providing Rs. 488 million for new ones on the other.

Nothing has changed. It is about time that it did. It is about time that we acknowledge the linkages of water management with the way our macro-economic management is shaped. Water does not need imported expensive technologies for improved

We still have problems despite the drought that we need an policy ensuring transparent water management secret deals over landments.

management. When the English colonisers started the Three Canals Project, including the Upper Jhelum Canal and the Lower Chenab canals in 1905 they did it with donkeys and pick axes. Why do we need foreign loans for digging drainage channels and putting in tube-wells when we can do that all by local resources. We need jobs. We do not need loans that transfer jobs outside of our economy.

The inability of dams to come to the rescue of the people in trying times like the present one

is a further reinforcement of the global experience that construction of massive structures is not the way to ensure water security. But this is still eluding most of our water managers. Some call for building of more dams. The federal minister for agriculture in consultation with others is considering outlandish science-fiction fixes for the drought. He wants to melt the Himalayan glaciers with lasers! It is the same mindset with differing orders of senility that is fixated upon spending more ill-contracted loans to put the system back in shape. Loans and foreign advice are the two real maladies responsible for the current state of the system in the Indus Basin.

It is in this context that the present drought and scarcity are compounding national injuries. There are well-researched and tested methods available for stretching the existing water for as many of our needs as the society deems necessary. We still have plenty of water despite the drought. But to share that we need an articulated water policy ensuring transparency in our water management instead of



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secret deals over loans and procurements. The crisis calls for a thorough review of our past efforts at improving the situation of water in order to determine the way forward for a sustainable future.

Water is a reflective medium. It will reflect our approach, attitude and relationship to it. It is time we tried out some human solutions without foreign advice and without foreign money. Let's begin by asking all concerned what can we do with our water within our own resources.