

xviii. Water Users' Associations [Pani Panchayats]

In order to organise various irrigation systems on efficient lines and to ensure reliable development and distribution of water resources, Andhra Pradesh Government has formalised setting up of Water Users' Associations. The objective of these associations shall be to promote and secure distribution of water among its users, adequate maintenance of irrigation system, efficient and economic utilisation of water to optimise agricultural production and to protect the environment by involving farmers by inculcating a sense of ownership of the irrigation system in accordance with the water budget and operational plan.

The WUAs are structured in relation to the hydraulic unit and field organisation of the irrigation department. Depending upon the size of the irrigation projects, there may be one or more tiers of WUAs. The General Body of WUAs will comprise of all water users who are also land holders in the area and other water users and individual or body corporate or a society using water for agriculture, domestic, power, non-domestic, commercial etc., from a government or similar source of irrigation.

Besides routine administrative functions, the WUAs will perform the following functions:

- Prepare and implement a “Waterbandi” schedule for each irrigation season, consistent with the operational plan, based upon the entitlement, area, soil and cropping pattern as approved by the distributary or project committee,
- Prepare a plan for the maintenance of irrigation system in the area of its operation at the end of each crop season and carry out the maintenance works of both distributary system and minor and field drains in its area of operation with the funds of the association from time to time.
- To regulate the use of water among the various pipe outlets under its area of operation according to the water-bandi schedule of the system
- Monitor flow of water for irrigation and resolve the disputes, if any, between the members in its area of operation.

The WUAs raise their resources by way of fees collected for the services rendered, funds granted from the government for development of the area of operation etc.

In Assam, a mechanism similar to WUAs may be formed in respective areas.

Where do we go from here?

We started with agriculture, discussed the need for shifting from rice to non-cereal crops diversifying to horticulture, livestock and fisheries and advantages of processing and using ICT to increase income of farmers. As mentioned that no development can take place in the absence of man. So, we discussed about the people's organisations at the grassroots level like FMCs, SHGs, Pani Panchayats, etc., as they are the heart and soul of any development process. Understanding the ethos of people and taking measures which may bring greater harmony and cohesiveness to the people and environment would be the best way to bring about rural prosperity of Assam. Therefore, integration of people's organisations with various measures explained in the road map would make Assam a better tomorrow.