Meghalaya State Water Policy
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1 PREAMBLE

Water is a prime natural resource, which is fundamental to life, livelihood, food security, and sustainable development. With urbanization, changing lifestyle, population growth and rising needs of a developing state, the availability, affordability and sustainability of utilizable water will be under further strain in future. Lack of sufficient storage capacity of water and poor water management practices, lead to seasonal water shortage and flash floods in some parts of the State. The dependency on springs for meeting drinking water needs is very high in the State and the discharge of these springs is dwindling, leading to hardships faced by the dependent population. In addition, the distribution of water is inequitable and there is a lack of a unified perspective in planning, management and use of water resources.

Low public consciousness about judicious use of water and its economic value also results in its wastage and inefficient use. Further, lack of awareness about sanitation and hygiene is leading to contamination of water resources and increased disease burden on local communities.

The water bodies in Meghalaya are also victims of degraded catchment areas, lack of conservation and rampant mining activities. The water quality degradation has adversely impacted the aquatic life and availability of potable water. The dwindling discharge water flow during lean season leads to adverse impact on agricultural productivity and other livelihood activities.

With rising needs, aspirations and impact of climate change, availability of utilizable water in future will be under further severe strain with the possibility of increased water conflicts among different user groups.

Sustainable and equitable planning, development and management of water resources is critical for the economic development of Meghalaya and for securing good health and livelihoods of her citizens, while protecting the State's natural assets. To ensure drinking water security for the people of Meghalaya, spring-shed management will be promoted.

Considering the multiple and competing needs for water and the increased pressure on water resources, it is imperative that an integrated and holistic approach is taken for water resources management, where the various social, economic and environmental needs are balanced and met in a sustainable manner.

In addition, the increasing expectations of people to have physical access to sufficient quantity of quality water for household and livelihood opportunities, warrants a new approach towards governance, development and management of water resources in the State. Moreover, planning, development and management of Water Resources need to be done by the State Government against the backdrop of national perspectives and by enabling systems that facilitate community management of this vital resource.

2. Policy Objectives

2.1 The State Water Policy of Meghalaya intends to "achieve sustainable development, management and use of Meghalaya's water resources with community participation to improve health and livelihoods, reduce vulnerability, while assuring good governance for the present and future generations by promoting Integrated Water Resources Management". Environmental

sustainability and conservation, social inclusion and equity, techno economic viability will be duly considered in relation to all aspects of governance, management and consumptive use of water resources to ensure inter-generational equity.

2.2 The specific objectives of the policy are as follows:

(i) Recognize water resources as a common pool resource;
(ii) Provide equitable, sustainable, economical and efficient allocation of water as a provision of water for life;
(iii) Provide safe and hygienic water for drinking, domestic and sanitation and livelihood development to all residents of the State;
(iv) Ensure protection and conservation of catchments all water sources to prevent degradation of the quantity and quality of water sources and promote principle of 3Rs- Reduce, Recycle and Reuse.
(v) Enhance resilience to disasters and the impacts of climate change;
(vi) Ensure convergence of all water related interventions and activities
(vii) Promote latest tools, technologies, dynamic and easily accessible data and information for use by the community and other stakeholders.
(viii) Promote and support community participation in development and management of water resources;
(ix) Setting up of an efficient and effective regulatory framework for the water sector in order to realize the economic value of water.

3. Water Allocation Priority

Priorities for water allocation for various usages will be broadly as follows:

(i) Drinking water, sanitation and other domestic needs
(ii) Minimum ecological needs
(iii) Irrigation/Agriculture
(iv) Hydropower generation
(v) Economic activities / Industrial Use / Fisheries
(vi) Other usages

4. Project Planning and Implementation

4.1 Comprehensive assessment of water resources in the State would be undertaken as follows:

(i) Mapping of rivers, streams, springs and other water bodies on watershed basis for their conservation and sustainable use;
(ii) Water assessment of both surface and ground water for both availability and quality ; and
(iii) Prepare an inventory of developmental projects of both surface & ground water projects, under the Water Sector, taking into account the demand-supply pattern.

4.2 Multi-disciplinary and integrated efforts will be undertaken for planning of water resources projects, at the Village/Town level, according to priorities set out in this policy. The concept of water as a Common Pool Resource would be considered to ensure equitable access to water. Viable traditional methods of water resources management and traditional community knowledge regarding the water resources along with the modern tools, technologies and approaches would be used in project planning.

4.3 Being inter-disciplinary in nature, water resources projects should be planned considering social and environmental aspects also, in addition to techno-economic considerations. Consultation with project affected and beneficiary families to ensure rehabilitation of and compensation for affected people wherever applicable. Catchment area management, environmental and ecological concerns, to maintain minimum water flow throughout the year and provision for fish movement will be considered during project planning. Special focus would be given to quality of project preparation and project management to reduce time and cost overruns and sub-optimal realization of benefits.

4.4 Private sector and civil society participation, wherever feasible, may be encouraged in planning, development and management of water resources project as this may help in introducing innovative ideas, generating financial resources, introducing corporate management and improving service efficiency and accountability to users.

4.5 The Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approach, with emphasis on finding reasonable and generally acceptable solutions for most of the stakeholders, should be followed for planning and management of water resources projects. Integrated Watershed development activities, need to be taken in a comprehensive manner to increase soil moisture, reduce soil erosion and increase overall land and water utility. To the extent possible, existing programs may be used by farmers to harvest rain water using farm ponds and other soil and water conservation measures.

4.6 The State would encourage creation of multipurpose reservoirs to promote water security, create livelihood opportunities and enhance power generation through Run of the River Schemes. Wherever feasible, development for navigation may be kept in mind right from the planning stage.

4.7 Similarly, small water storage structures for rainwater harvesting and Ground Water Recharge, spring-shed development and spring rejuvenation would be promoted to improve water security. Ground water resources would also be explored for the purpose, wherever it is a cost-effective solution. Conjunctive use of water would be promoted to balance demand-supply of water throughout the year.

4.8 The concept of inter-linking of rivers may be taken into consideration, as and when the need arises, to ensure equitable distribution of water resources.

4.9 Use of surplus water as an economic good will be promoted through export of surplus water to water scarce regions for the interest of the State and the Country as a whole.

4.10 Financing for developmental projects will be based on expected outcome, current status, needs, opportunities, fund requirement, and priority be given for completion of on-going projects and rehabilitation of existing schemes.

4.11 Project implementation should be structured to incentivize efficient & economic use of water. All components of water resources projects should be planned and executed in a pari-passu manner so that intended benefits start accruing immediately and there is no gap between potential created and potential utilized.

4.12 Areas of convergence with other departments would be identified and concerned government departments/ agencies would be involved, wherever required in the entire project lifecycle.

4.13 Concurrent monitoring of project should be undertaken for timely interventions to avoid time and cost over-runs.

4.14 Monitoring and evaluation system would be established to identify bottlenecks for timely redressal and to analyze the impact of projects.

4.15 A system would be established by the Meghalaya's State Dam Safety Organization (SDSO) to undertake safety audit of bigger dams in the State at periodic intervals to identify and manage safety risks and ensure safety of the dam and mitigate adverse impacts.

5. Participatory Water Resource Management

5.1 A coherent and coordinated approach would be adopted to promote community and other stakeholders participation in planning and management of water resources to ensure self-sufficiency of water for villages and for promoting localized water utilization and decentralized water management. Therefore, it will be the fundamental duty of each & every citizen to play an active role in Participatory Water Resource Management.

5.2 In its endeavour to ensure safe water for domestic use and sanitation and water for livelihood activities, the State would empower and develop the capacity of communities to develop, regenerate and sustainably manage available water resources.

5.3 Efforts would also be made to encourage the associations of beneficiaries/ water users to own up the responsibilities to operate, maintain and manage the water infrastructures in the State. Steps would be taken, in collaboration with the communities, to ensure the sustainability of the water infrastructures.

5.4 The community and other stakeholders would be emphasized to take up reclamation of the abandoned degraded mines and old quarry areas. The community will also be encouraged to take up cleaning of rivers from time to time.

5.5 Protection and preservation of Fish Habitat and sanctuaries will be promoted through Community participation.

6. Conserving, Harnessing and Promoting Efficient Use of Water Resources

6.1. Appropriate actions will be taken to conserve and rejuvenate existing rivers, springs, reservoirs and to maintain their water quality and flow rate especially during the lean period. Conservation consciousness would be promoted through education, regulation, incentives and disincentives. For conservation of water resources, more focus may be on activities that have the possibility to minimize negative impacts and such activities should be planned and prioritized phase wise on a broad timeline.

6.2. In planning process, all the water usages/ demands and water availability will take into account the minimum ecological needs.