

C-11: Do we pay adequate attention to the quality of Irrigation water in the management of irrigation systems

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As water resources become more limited, increased use is being made of inferior irrigation water. Without proper management, based on knowledge of the possible harmful effects, prolonged application of such water can lead to very serious repercussions.

Although irrigation water has been used in the world for several centuries, it is only in this century that the importance of quality of irrigation water has been recognized.

According to the TAMS Environmental Assessment, application of pesticides has been identified as a problem in the development areas under the Mahaweli Scheme. Sampling done in 1979 indicated very high concentrations of DDT, Aldrin, Endosulfan and Dieldrin. These were restricted chemicals, representing a significant health hazard to the use of surface and ground water.

Also, it has been observed that the increased use of agro-chemicals in the Mahaweli areas has not been monitored effectively, due to the absence of institutional development. The practice has been to obtain advice of chemical sales agents regarding application rates.

The use of inorganic fertilizer has probably contributed to the growth and propagation of algae blooms, water ferns and salvinia in canals, minor reservoirs and drainage.

Farmers prefer to adopt chemical control of weeds and insects. These agro-chemicals can result in a significant degradation of water quality, threatening health conditions of humans and wildlife.