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Arrangements for Sustainable Water Allocation for Irrigated Agriculture Sector in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is an agricultural country with great irrigation history. The irrigated agriculture is a major water consumer, which dominates domestic and industrial requirements. Economic

development, population growth, increasing demands for food production, hydropower generation and adequate water for domestic, industrial and commercial use and sanitation services continue to put pressure on water resources significantly. As agriculture consumes more than 80 percent of the available water, there will be intense pressure to transfer water out of agriculture and to meet the needs of other sectors.

Rice is a major staple food of Sri Lanka, which consumes a lot of water. Water for irrigation is essential for the security of food supplies. This also recognizes the importance of irrigation water for rural development, employment creation, and poverty alleviation other than food production. At national level the scarcity of water is not so serious, but difficulties are met in specific regions and catchment areas. The available water resources have been subjected to competing uses without concern to its equitable distribution among users. There is no incentive for conserving water although many are deprived of basic requirements of water shortages arose from climatic changes and inefficient systems adopted in water use, in the light of rising economic, social and environmental demands. Therefore, it is very important to introduce a better water allocation method and better decision making process for irrigated agriculture sector.

An integrated approach is needed to reform water sector policies in Sri Lanka. An analytical framework was followed for the assessment of institutional setting and capacity building requirement for Integrated Water Resources Management. Assessing the experiences of the water resources management system in developed and developing countries, it has been found that the introduction of new concepts and tools of Integrated Water Resources Management are needed to improve capacity building in the water sector. These concepts and tools are to be introduced at river basin scale. Stakeholder participation at different levels of decision making and management, decision making at the lowest appropriate level, private sector participation, demand management and water sector reformed based on hydrological boundaries were identified as a solution to these described problems.