

BOOK REVIEW

Drinking Water Management: Problems and Prospects

J. Cyril Kanmony, 2010, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, ISBN 81-8324-346-0, hard cover, pp.xx+151, price: Rs.495

Drinking water – a precious resource of the present day – the pattern of its consumption in the rural and urban areas, the economics involved in the consumption, the issue of water pollution and related diseases, the various water management practices, the schemes of the government for the promotion of water supply, the problems involved in the distribution and consumption of water, and suggestions for appropriate measures to improve the water conservation and management practices are the major aspects discussed in the book under review. The book is based on a research study conducted by the author in the Kanyakumari district of the state of Tamil Nadu in India. The study covered a sample of 240 households randomly selected from 20 local self-government areas, representing the coastal, midland and hilly regions of the district. A multi stage sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample of households and interview was the method used for eliciting the data from the respondents. However, information on when the study was conducted is not provided in the book so that the reader is unable to know how recent are the data presented in the book.

The book has 10 chapters arranged in the pattern of a conventional research report. The first four chapters of the book provide the introduction to the subject matter of the study, the research methodology adopted in the study and the related literature on the subject matter. Chapters 5-9 present the findings of the research study, mainly on water resources, and distribution and utilisation of water. The final chapter gives the highlights of the findings and certain suggestions for water management.

The first chapter deals with the per capita availability of fresh water across the globe, an overview of the different water supply schemes and their implementation in India, with special focus on Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. Chapter 2 presents the objectives, hypotheses and methodology of the study along with clarification of the major concepts. Chapter 3 presents the review of literature on the various aspects of the subject matter of the study. The aspects covered here include availability of fresh water and its utilisation, sources of drinking water, patterns of consumption and supply of water, ground water and its exploitation, water pollution and its causes and effects on health, water distribution and the extent of water loss, wasteful utilisation of water, and conflicts for control of water sources. Under the theoretical framework given in the fourth chapter water is presented as a unique commodity. The chapter also discusses the possible pricing systems in the supply of water in order to regulate the demand for water.

Detailed description of the sources of water in the locality covered by the study is given in the fifth chapter which throws light on the extent of the availability of water in the place. Chapter 6 of the book provides the socio-economic profile of the respondent households. A specific piece of information presented here is on the existence of inequalities in income distribution in the coastal and rural areas covered in the study. Chapter 7 deals with the demand and supply of water, and its utilisation pattern in the rural, urban and coastal areas during the different seasons. As per the results of the study, the factors that influenced the demand for water in a particular season were income of the household, availability of the source of water in one's own household premises, family size and the extent of dependence on other surface sources of water. The various schemes of water supply provided by the local bodies to the sampled population and their differential system of water charges for the rural and urban households are presented in the eighth chapter of the book. The author considers the differential system of higher water charges for the urban people compared to the rural people as unfair. Chapter 9 is on the quality of drinking water. It discusses the issue of water pollution and the resultant diseases, and the measures taken by the concerned authorities in tackling the problem. The chapter also provides a

description of the steps taken in water management, viz. metered water connection to individual households, and maintenance of public water sources.

The tenth and last chapter of the book presents the major findings of the study and their likely policy implications for management of water, especially conservation. The findings that have been highlighted by the author are those on the views of the people on safe water, seasonal changes in the demand for water and the gender issue in water. The respondents of the study were found to prefer piped water because they have been led to believe that piped water or water obtained from hand pumps is much safer than water from other sources. Demand for water and its utilisation were found to be more during the months of dry season. Women faced more hardships in collecting water for domestic purposes. Some of the suggestions for conservation of water and its effective management, given by the author on the basis of the findings of the study, are promotion of participatory approach (involving users of water especially women), enlisting the involvement of service groups and non-government organisations, popularisation of rain water harvesting for individual households, fair water charges, and strict enforcement of the pollution prevention and control acts.

A positive aspect of the book is that it gives an overview of the various water supply schemes as implemented in the district of Kanyakumri and the response of the community to them. The book has also provided some useful suggestions for the effective water management practices that can be replicated elsewhere. Also the subject matter of the book – water management and related aspects – is a current issue of much social relevance. The book is organised in the form of a conventional research report. As a result, every effort is made to follow the methodological steps of survey research in reporting the findings of the study. The data generated by the research study are presented in the routine tabular form, which has made the reading of the book rather monotonous. In the chapter on review of literature, the author provides a relatively long list of works on various aspects of water management. The book would have been a much better organised work, if the matter presented under the review of literature were integrated with, or related to the findings of the study. That would have required the

author to deviate from the pattern of maintaining an independent section on review of literature adopted in the conventional research report. The chapter on the methodology of the research study is written in the form of a research proposal to be submitted to a sponsoring agency (viz. how the study *will be* carried out). The appropriate style here would have been to report how the study *was* conducted.

The author has chosen to deal with a current social issue of not only national but perhaps even global relevance. The book touches upon several important aspects of this current social issue. It should serve as a useful work for those who are interested and involved in the management of water, particularly at the grassroots level.

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