

CHENNAI

Disasters: 'Drought in Tamil Nadu mostly man-made'

Monday 20 November 2017, by [VENKAT Vidya](#) (Date first published: 30 June 2017).

Movement to retrieve rivers says State can be self-sufficient in water if sources are managed properly.

With 17 big rivers and 99 small rivers, the State which had suffered the worst drought in 2016-17, could be water self-sufficient if its resources are managed properly.

Raising the point at a meeting organised by the Tamil Nadu Rivers Retrieval Movement here on Wednesday, 'waterman of India' and Ramon Magsaysay awardee Rajendra Singh, retired Supreme Court judge V. Gopala Gowda, and several farmers had put forth their ideas on how a people's movement could be built on the ground to pull the State out of its current water crisis.

The movement had taken the initiative to revive five major rivers in the State: Thamirabarani, Vaigai, Cauvery, Paalar and Pennaiyaar, through community engagement.

Emphasising that water was a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution Justice Gowda said that destroying the ecological flow of rivers through encroachments on riverbeds, indiscriminate sand mining, and allowing deforestation around catchment areas in order to promote extractive industries, constituted a violation of citizen's fundamental rights.

Known for his pro-farmer judgement in the Singur land acquisition case in West Bengal, the former judge wanted to help Tamil Nadu solve its water crisis despite hailing from Karnataka. Retired High Court judges and experts in the fields of environment and water should be appointed in the people's commission of inquiry for river retrieval, Justice Gowda said adding that the commission would be formed on July 18.



People's participation

Stressing that the drought in the State was predominantly man-made, Mr. Rajendra Singh urged the

people to unitedly oppose the destruction of natural resources and work to revive the dying rivers and water bodies in their neighbourhood.

“When I saw the dry river bed of Cauvery a month ago during my tour, I was reminded of the Rajasthan desert back where I work,” he recalled with sorrow. “What we need right now is community ownership of waterbodies.”

In a presentation put together by A. Veerappan, chief coordinator of TN PWD Senior Engineer’s Association, information on the State’s enormous water resources was shared, which showed that if only these were maintained properly, the State would not have to look elsewhere to meet its water requirements.

The data showed how 259 tmcft [thousand million cubic feet] of flood water was wasted by draining into the sea annually.

Madras Institute of Development Studies Professor S. Janakarajan spoke about how government programmes for water conservation funded by foreign development banks such as World Bank and Asian Development Bank were only helping to push the growth figures upwards while no real work had happened on the ground to restore the water bodies. Mr. Janakarajan cited the example of the 6000 crore ‘IAMWARM’ water management project.

“Despite spending crores of money why are the lakes in Tamil Nadu disappearing,” he asked, adding that these costly projects only aimed at greening of national accounts while achieving nothing on the ground.

He also ruled out the need for desalination projects in Tamil Nadu since there was sufficient rainwater, which if tapped efficiently could meet the water requirements.

“The government is only interested in demanding relief money every time there is drought or flood. But it should link floods and droughts and manage water in a manner that flood water is stored to meet the deficiency during drought.”

Farmers hailing from the districts where the five rivers chosen for rejuvenation flowed, spoke about the need to build check dams to harness rainwater for agriculture and undertake river water conservation through community efforts.

Vidya Venkat

P.S.

* CHENNAI, JUNE 30, 2017 01:09 IST. UPDATED: JUNE 30, 2017 08:36 IST:
<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/chennai/drought-in-tamil-nadu-mostly-man-made/article19181865.ece>