

Our Resources Auctioned

Water - Our Source of Life for Sale: at the India Social Forum

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11th November 2006; 4pm - 7pm

Room No. M15; Indian Social Forum, New Delhi

The neo liberal economic model and its beliefs in the free market have come to be the only economic choice of the whole world. With increasing corporate control in all aspects of our life, almost everything has been privatised and commodified and put up for sale, even those critical areas of life and natural resource like air and water.

Trade in water was given a boost at the Second World Water Forum at The Hague in March 2002 made up of the World Bank, the water TNCs, and the development agencies of the developed countries and thus paved the way for private corporations to sell water for profit.

Leading perspectives on liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation have influenced the National Water Policy of India (2002) which has serious flaws and the leading one being- that water is a prime natural resource. Isn't water a common natural resource to be used as a community resource - to be shared, rather than owned? This then leads to a natural opening for manipulations by international financial institutions. The proponents of water privatisation would have us believe that the global water crisis, the inefficiency and corruption of our public sector undertakings has made it imperative to privatise and price water.

Groundwater in states that have taken to intensive agriculture under the so-called Green Revolution of the 70s are now turning brackish or are ridden with fluorides and/or arsenic. The situation has been aggravated by encouraging digging of millions of tubewells and borewells energised by electric and diesel driven pumps. Linked to this is the concept of "virtual water". Spurt in growth of export oriented or cash crops has led to a large part of India's freshwater going into agricultural production of commercial crops which are grown in arid regions thus increasing the cost of production, the debt burden of the farmers, and shipping out of large amounts of precious water resource from the region.

Global corporate interests are not restricted to agriculture alone- it is even keener in the area of packaging the "blue gold" for sale. The Government of India gives away water practically free to bottling companies who treat this water and sell it back for a profit. More often than not, the victims of this type of water piracy are the local communities- women and children in particular. The Hindustan Coca Cola factory in Plachimada is one such prime example.

India's water is being sold in the name of "privatisation", in the name of "efficiency" or in the name of "public-private partnership". But have we stopped to find out why is the government being allowed to sell our very source for life? Hence, is water a commodity to profiteer in or is it a human right? According to the National Water Policy communities are the "rightful custodians of water". However, this is not the case in our country. Already localities of these communities are divided along caste lines and water usage is one mechanism in play. Participatory community usage of water through 'pani panchayats' or water users associations which have been failures as they bypass the poor completely.

The Supreme Court in India has ruled that the government holds water in India as trustee on behalf of its people and thus in the public trust. But the National Water Policy as we have it today speaks of communities only as an afterthought. Thus if we grant absolute ownership of water to the state, the latter would be its owner and then we- the rest of the community- would have to concede to the state being free to regulate this resource- the resource which is our source of life.

It is these issues of human right to water that reflects on the country's food adequacy and security situation. Why are we letting the government indulge the corporates in their quest for profit? The session in discussion would discuss the National Water Policy 2002 and how it bypasses basic rights of communities in India , virtual water trade that is being taken up the country through encouragement given to export oriented cash crops and violations of human right to food and water.

The Consultation will be on "Water- Our Source of Life for Sale " will be held in New Delhi on 11th November 2006 during the Indian Social Forum. The aim is to initiate a process of sharing, comparing notes and discussions on the critical issues concerning water in different corners of the country. The discussions would encompass issues of availability and accessibility, social justice and people's rights in access and utilisation of water and sustainability. The key issues would be rights and controls - over sources as well as management. The questions of alternatives thus feature strongly in the campaign. We would also attempt to formulate a shared critique of the National Water Policy. The consultation would be an interactive session and would share experiences and critical reflection to seek commonalities and build solidarity on a national level.

Please make it convenient to be there and do confirm the details with us as soon as possible.

Looking forward to meeting you!

Thanks and Regards,

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