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Traditional Institution in Tank Water Management: Case of Tamil Nadu, India

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Abstract

The traditional irrigational institution seems to have functioned relatively effective in almost all the tank villages in Tamil Nadu, India at least until the early 1970s. There were two layers of irrigation functionaries at village level. One is to enforce the rule and regulation for sharing and caring of tank water resources and another one to execute the work based on deemed direction of rules in force. While upper caste large farmers invariably constituted in the first category, the scheduled caste farmers and labourers were employed for second type of employment like sluice operation, field water management and others. In this second type of employment the water man traditionally called as “Neerkatti” has an important role to play since the quantity of irrigation water is become very scarce. The Neerkatties are critical for ensuring inflow of water to the tank and its equal distribution among the field in ayacut. This paper proposed to capture contemporary condition of traditional irrigation institution and its efficiency and in particular the role of the Neerkatti on tank water management. This paper provides empirical evidence about different type of irrigation functionaries existed and their perceived roles and performance. We also tried in this paper to capture the possible reason for dismantling of traditional institution. It concludes that traditional institution is demonstrated its ability in the past and has potential to maintain tank resources sustainably in the present condition. This is based on our data collected through field survey in seven tank villages and interviewing 31 irrigation functionaries’ families from seven irrigation tanks in Madurai District of Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: India, instituion, Neerkatti, Tamil Nadu, tank irrigation