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Go for lake development, junk Yettinahole, IISc experts tell govt

The study suggests various steps to bring water security to Kolar and Chikkaballapura districts.

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(<http://www.bfirst.in/sites/default/files/images/articles/2016/10/22/yettinahole.jpg>)

Bengaluru: The state government is 'determined' to implement Yettinahole project to quench the thirst of Kolar and Chikkaballapur districts, despite the project causing long-term environmental damage to the Nethravathi river and Western Ghats. Now, the country's premiere research institute, Indian Institute of Science (IISc) has said that there is no need for such projects as the two districts had surplus water and can have sustainable water security, if they go for proper water management.

The State Water resources department has already spent hundreds of crores of rupees for Yettinahole project even before the obtaining clearance of project from Union Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF) citing water scarcity in Chikkaballapur and Kolar districts.

The people of Dakshina Kannada and those living near Western Ghats are protesting against the project stating that their livelihoods will be affected. Furthermore, the IISc's Energy and Wetland Group (EWG), in Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES), has come out revealing findings.

It says that such mega projects are unnecessary as the two districts have sufficient water about 129.7 TMC and advises the decision makers not to embark upon such mega projects to divert rivers. The study has instead suggested to go in for watershed rejuvenation programmes.

“We urge the sensible decision-makers to opt immediately for the decentralized watershed rejuvenation programs to sustain the water in Kolar and ensure adequate quantity and quality of water this requires a small amount of money when compared to mega projects like river diversion. The government should not go for proposals such as Yettinahole diversion - where water available for diversion is less than 1 TMC and will only benefit the consortium of consultant-contractor-bureaucrats),” says a report from CES..

The long study, conducted since last 15 years by a team headed by Dr T V Ramachandra, senior Scientist, EWG, CES, IISc and comprising researchers T V Vinay, S Bhargavi and Bharath S Aiythal used census data, livestock census, temperature and remote sensing data, data collection, land use analysis, hydrogeological analysis. It reveals that proper management including water-harvesting, sewage management, improving water storage in lakes and management of catchment area and afforestation ensure adequate water can help address Kolar's water deficit.

The Kolar-Chikkaballapur region located in semi-arid climatic zone receives an average rainfall of 690 +or - 201 mm/yr temp between 14 to 35.7 deg centigrade. The CES report says that two districts together have 4380 lakes encompassing an area of 450 sq kms with current water holding capacity of 15 tmc (with accumulated silt). The current population being 28.21 lakhs is likely to touch 32.53 lakh, by 2021 and considering the domestic demand of about 135 litres per capita consumption per day, THE annual demand for water might increase to 5.27 TMC.

“Assessment of water yield shows that the total of 129.7 TMC of water per year is available in

Kolar (Kolar district 63.8 TMC, Chikballapur district 65.9 TMC), which highlights that there is sufficient water is available in the region, provided water harvesting strategies are adopted. This requires sensible planning of natural resources. The government should stop wasting public money on large-scale projects,” the study says.

Pointing out to the land use analyses, where the forest cover in the district being a meagre 6.5 per cent and the waste land being about 38 per cent, the paper titled ‘Water Security in Kolar, Karnataka’ is highly critical of the policies followed so far.

”The extent of wasteland in the district highlights the mismanagement of land resources in the region. The Government elected by people in the democratic process, need to shun the path of colonial imperial style of functioning and initiate a consultative mechanism through brain storming sessions involving all stake holders- unbiased subject experts, critics, public (likely to be affected) and the government officials. This has to be done before approving any large scale projects, which are likely threaten peoples livelihood with the serious economic and environmental implications.”

The study suggests various steps to bring water security to Kolar and Chikkaballapura districts. These are:

- (i) Decentralized rain water harvesting through lakes
- (ii) Rejuvenation of existing lakes through desilting and integrated watershed treatment and management
- (iii) Effective Soil and Water conservation through watershed management which involves planting native saplings and grasses in the catchment, while ensuring at least 30-40% native green cover in each lake catchment
- (iv) Phasing out monoculture plantation of exotic species such as Eucalyptus, etc.
- (v) Incentives to farmers growing crops for semi-arid region
- (vi) Restrictions of water intensive crops in the region, and
- (vii) Voluntary retirement of all decision-makers of the region who have mismanaged the region and deprived the local people of livelihood.

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