

## **Integrated water resources management in the Mahaweli and adjacent river basins**

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Several institutions and line agencies are exclusively involved in the key management functions of water resources in the Mahaweli and adjacent river basins. The Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka has completed the major development phases of the largest integrated rural development program. Water has been provided for irrigation to large areas in the dry zone; facilities were provided for settlers; hydropower generation has increased; conservation measures in the upper watershed have been taken. Thus food production, poverty alleviation, employment opportunities industrial development, urban centers has been improved significantly. Conservation of upper watershed, stakeholder participation in water panel meeting and bulk water allocation are good examples for implementation of the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management. Water allocation through institutional coordination among irrigation, hydropower generation, domestic water supply and ecological requirements has been practiced for more than 15 years. Farmers are empowered in managing water in an efficient and equitable manner through the introduction of bulk water allocation system in 2001.

However, some key elements of sustainable water management such as water use, pollution and control, monitoring of water resources, financial management, information management are not given much emphasis. Instead, other line agencies have been given the mandates of those elements with required resources and substantial legal support.

The key elements for the sustainable water management in the Mahaweli and the adjacent river basins have to be identified. Institutions and other line agencies involve require a basin plan with a common vision and goals with the consensus of people. Existing coordination mechanism between the institutions has to be strengthened and developed for this purpose. Participation of users at sub catchment levels is necessary for dialogues, effective use of water resources and conflict resolution. Therefore, virtual river basin organization with a set of institutions and line agencies would be a better strategy for sustainable water management in Mahaweli and adjacent river basins.

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