



## Section F

### Ensuring Irrigation Water User Rights in a Market Driven Economy: With Special Reference to the Village Irrigation Systems in Sri Lanka

Mohottala G Kularatne

Department of Economics, University of Kelaniya

Proper understanding of the context of a policy is critical to its success. There are no “one size fits all” policies. The context matters a lot, and thorough studies are the only means to assess the context properly, and to understand how people make decisions regarding usage of water. In this discourse, a mechanism for ensuring irrigation water user rights in the context of a market driven economy with evidence from village irrigation systems in Sri Lanka is discussed, and suggests policy options for these systems to maximize these synergies as a way to fulfill the challenge of producing more food, conserving the environment and enhancing food security in the current market economic background without talking about water pricing. The problem description is presented first, followed by the suggested policy options. The final section provides possible policy recommendations.

#### Introduction

A reliable and efficient water supply is a fundamental prerequisite for human survival and social development. About 60% of the human body consists of water. Our vital organs – the brain, heart, kidney, lungs, muscles and skin have more water. The need for water depends on our genetic makeup, stages of growth and how we live: as a percentage babies and children have more water than adults, women have less water than men. Water is the most essential limited input in nature for food production though it covers a larger part of the globe. Food is a very basic need for human survival but to whom do the user rights of water belong to? The importance of ensuring water user rights in a market promoted economy is discussed.

Changes in supply and demand are placing increasing pressure on water resources across the globe. Enhancing supply reliability and efficiency of water is a global challenge of huge proportions, and making water available, when and where needed in appropriate quantities and of a reasonable quality to match the purpose is no easy task. Social, environmental, technological and economic realities that vary across space and over time dictate what is achievable in a particular location at a particular time. Random measures that disregard this complexity can only aggravate the nature of the challenge. Therefore, managing water resources is a social priority. This involves developing approaches to prioritise the needs of water users, including the environment.

One of the key challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is matching supply and demand for water. The question is, can we maintain current standards of water use in a context of:

1. Rising populations
2. Urbanization
3. Declining environmental stocks,
4. Changing social preferences (change of life style) and technological options, and
5. Uncertainties of climate change and pollution of water resources? (Aheeyar *et al.*, 2008)