

B31-7.3 tube wells / privatization  
India water use  
Uttar Pradesh

## State Government to Hand Over Tubewells to Users in India

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In India, the idea of handing over smaller units of canals to farmer water users has been debated since the 1980s. However, the idea did not prove very successful in Uttar Pradesh--the largest state of India.

In spite of that, the Uttar Pradesh government has now extended the concept of turnover to tubewell systems. In February 1992, the state government decided to hand over, on lease, one hundred tubewells (with command areas of about 100 ha)

belonging to the Irrigation Department, in the first instance, to the farmers of the command areas after constituting a tubewell cooperative society for looking after the operation and maintenance of the tubewells.

Recently I studied two such tubewell systems in the eastern belt of U.P.--one in the Gorakhpur District and the other in the Sultanpur District. In spite of a large command area, one of the systems was doing very well.

More interesting results have, however, come up from the West Bengal Minor Irrigation Project, funded by the World Bank. In contrast to the initial project design that Panchayats would be used as management agents for operating shallow wells and that O&M funds would be allocated by the government to the Panchayats, the government of West Bengal, during the implementation of the project, decided that these low duty tubewells and shallow tubewells would be fully managed by the Panchayats and that the Panchayats would levy water rates to recover full O&M costs from the beneficiaries.

By December 1991, when I went to West Bengal as part of the World Bank review mission, a total of 204 low duty tubewells and 283 shallow tubewells had been handed over to the Panchayats for management and upkeep. The government ultimately plans to hand over 824 low duty tubewells and 1548 shallow tubewells to the Panchayats by March 1994, when the project is completed.

These tubewells were in clusters of six, each spreading over a command area of about 20 ha. In each of the systems I visited, the O&M had been entrusted to the beneficiary committees at the cluster level

(comprising six tubewells). The pattern and composition of the committees, however, varied not only from district to district, but also within the same district. In one district, for instance, there was a committee for each of the six tubewells and over and above these six committees, there was a central committee. In two other districts, I found only one beneficiary committee managing all the six tubewells, each system sending one representative. I discovered varying kinds of patterns and varying degrees of success in the management of these tubewells with respect to beneficiary committees, staff appointments, payment to staff, and water charges, including mode of recovery of water charges. The account keeping and watch and ward of the tubewell installations are again site specific.

The following strong points were found in the arrangements: (i) a sense of involvement among users; (ii) high level of utilization of irrigation water; (iii) self-funded management; (iv) highly decentralized and flexible management, and (v) donation of the land for the construction of a pump house by someone among the users. The biggest shortcoming I noticed was the absence of any training to Panchayat members with respect to technical, financial and accounting procedures and agricultural aspects relating to water use.

The government of U.P. has also recently decided to construct and hand over to farmers a number of tubewells, each having a command area of 20 ha. These tubewells are to be constructed with Dutch funds and would be leased out to a Panchayat Samiti, duly constituted by the beneficiary farmers, for the O&M of the tubewells.

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6.31.7.3 tubewells / farmer managed irrigation systems / environmental issues