

Water for Healthy Life style



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Countries in the sub-Saharan Africa are riddled with problems related to deficit of water. That is why viable water management policy and judicious utilization of water is required for sustainable development. Why effective water management policy is needed in countries like Eritrea is so clear. The geographical location of Eritrea makes it susceptible to water crisis. What seems abundant may at any time be over exploited and leave populations in danger.

An increase in the demand of water in terms of quantity and quality is the pushing factor for drafting national water management policy. Hence, water resources survey has been made in the country.

In the pre-independence period less than seven percent of the Eritrean population in rural areas and 30% in urban areas used to have access to potable water. Due to efforts to ensure even distribution of water in all areas of the country, 92% of urban and 80% of rural areas now have easy access to potable water.

According to Mr. Mebrahtu Eyassu, DG of the Department of Water at the Ministry of Land Water and Environment, the management of water resources is one of the priorities of the country. Various infrastructures have been put in place in order to ensure supply of water for food security and other socio-economic activities.

The demand of water has been increasing with the ongoing improvement of living standards of nationals. That is why continuous investment has been made to ensure steady water supply. What has been achieved so far is a stepping stone for further implementation of development programs.

Based on the growing demand in various sectors, a policy that aims for sustainable development has been drafted and is being implemented. The national water resource management policy underlines that proper conservation of land resources and reforestation programs coupled with judicious utilization of water are the key elements that determine sustainability of water supply.

Surveying the overall national water reserve was essential in understanding the overall national water demand in all sectors. Scientific knowledge about the utilization and management of water resources is also another area of concern. All the efforts that have been exerted are intended to provide viable service to all nationals.

Mr. Mebrahtu Eyassu underscores that the main concern of the Government is protecting water sources from pollution, combating factors that could lead to deficit of water and ensuring even and as sustainable distribution of water to all parts of the country.



Mr. Mebrahtu is of the idea that Eritrea is potentially rich in water resources. But the potential resource has not been effectively utilized. Almost 90% of the Eritrean population depends on underground water. Thus, the current focus is to impound as much surface water as possible and to preserve underground water for unforeseen challenges and droughts.

Human resource development in the management and research related to water resources has also been a priority. Thus, upgrading people's awareness as regards sanitation of water and its impact on health as well

as economic and environmental importance have been part of the overall efforts.

Factors that affect the abundance and deficit of water need to be seen based on availability of water in the form of ice, gas and liquid. According to Mr. Mebrahtu, only 2.5 % of global water is potable and of this only 1.3 is available in liquid form.

So far around 300 small and medium sized water reservoirs have been constructed and hold around 4,000,000 cubic meter of water. With this development, supply of potable water to all parts of the country has redoubled. So far, around 1,500 water distribution centers have been established. Many parts of Eritrea have been provided with commendable supply of potable water. However much needs to be done to ensure its sustainability and to reach areas that do not have access to potable water.

The sanitation of underground and surface water is of a major concern. Over exploitation of ground water, an increase in population size, expansion of agro industry, hazardous chemicals from industrial plants, pesticides, overgrazing, erosion and desertification, dryness of rivers and river banks are among the factors that negatively affect the availability of fresh water.

Mr. Mebrahtu reiterated that Eritrea's location in the sub-Sahara region and climate change have their effect on the availability of fresh water. It is often based on the abundance of fresh water that various development programs are charted out.

The establishment of settlements and urbanization are done based on the survey of the quantity, quality and distribution of water in the country. Thus, research on the availability of water usually determines the implementation of successful development programs. Lack of needed infrastructure and imbalance of demand and supply may lead to disaster. Hence, Mr. Mebrahtu said that extensive research has so far been conducted in Eritrea.

Expansion of industries, agricultural areas, mining and other socio-economic activities demand huge amount of water, and thus, create pressure in meeting demands. So, effective utilization of water resources is a remedial solution.

Mr. Mebrahtu emphasized that even though Eritrea's potential water resource is high, so far, only 20% of the overall national demand of water needed for all agricultural, industrial, mining and domestic and tourism uses has been reserved. The needed amount of water will be met when the capacity of water reservoirs is expanded. Judicious utilization of water particularly drip irrigation will make a difference in the reduction of water consumption in the agro industry.

What Mr. Mebrahtu worries about is not the provision of water distribution infrastructures but ensuring its sustainability. "It should be noted that water is a common resource of all nationals and water for domestic use is a priority," Mr. Mebrahtu added.

To ensure sustainable access to potable water, various programs have been implemented. Community based management has been part of the comprehensive water management program. Training has been offered and efforts have been made to ensure safety of water. Ownership and responsibility of water projects has been given to villages and maintenance tools have been offered.

As regards the achievements registered in enduring distribution of potable water, Mr. Mebrhatu said water-borne diseases that were common in the pre-independence period have now been eradicated. Based on WHO's standards people should not travel more than one km to fetch water. The distance issue has been resolved in the country. A large part of Eritrea has easy access to potable water in a distance of not more than the set standard.

Because of the steady supply of water in rural areas, a number of children have been to pursue their education at ease. Similarly the burden on healthcare facilities has been alleviated with the eradication of water-borne diseases.

Water is a common resource for all nationals and, thus, drilling wells without permission from the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment is illegal. Domestic usage is a priority and all nationals have equal right to water, Mr. Mebrahtu elaborated

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