

Merchants' Chamber of Commerce & Industry

Interactive Session with

Shri Subrata Mukherjee

**Hon'ble Minister for Water Resources Investigation & Development (WRID)
and Panchayat & Rural Development (PRD), Govt. of West Bengal**

on

"Assuring Irrigation to Small & Marginal Farmers of West Bengal"

on 19 July 2018 at 2.00 p.m. at MCCI Conference Hall

Brief Proceedings

The Chamber organized an Interactive Session with **Shri Subrata Mukherjee**, Hon'ble Minister for Water Resources Investigation & Development and Panchayat & Rural Development, Govt. of West Bengal on **"Assuring Irrigation to Small & Marginal Farmers of West Bengal"** today at its premises.

- Addressing the members, **Shri Subrata Mukherjee** said that the Arsenic problem in 7 districts of the state had been the most wide spread in the world, excepting Bangladesh. Water for irrigation & agriculture should also be made arsenic free, like water for human consumption, otherwise fruits and vegetables grown from trees prone to arsenic water, might also contain elements leading to cancer, he observed.
- He expressed concern over the depleting ground water level and felt that this should be stopped before reaching an alarming level.
- The Hon'ble Minister said that in West Bengal, small & marginal farmers constitute 96% of total farmers and hold around 80.7% of the land, the average size of land holding being 0.77 ha. He said that in West Bengal there are 4 medium & major projects e.g. Teesta, Damodar Valley, Kansabati & Mayurakshi projects with a culturable command area (CCA) of 13,03,434 hectares. There are a total of 5,08,250 minor irrigation schemes covering CCA of 23,65,351 hectares, he noted.
- In a bid to boost agricultural productivity, a total of 16,901 minor irrigation schemes were set up till June 2018 by Department of WRID, he added.
- He mentioned that since the priority of the Government had always been to extend maximum benefits to small and marginal farmers, it had been ensured that schemes would be so located where 85% or more of the beneficiaries belong to small and marginal farmers. He further noted that 96% of the beneficiaries of the minor irrigation are small and marginal farmers.
- Major intervention in minor irrigation has played a pivotal role in boosting agricultural production in the state. The achievable minor irrigation potential in the state has been estimated at 44.34 lakh hectares, out of which 31.34 lakh hectares expected to be drawn from ground water resources and 13.00 lakh hectare from surface water. Owing to successful implementation of irrigation, the crop intensity has increased from 177% in 2010–11 to 188% now, he observed.

- He referred to an externally aided project, named, **“West Bengal Accelerated Development of Minor Irrigation Project”**, supported by World Bank and Govt. of West Bengal for management of surface and ground water, which was functional since 2013 to increase agricultural productivity and rural employment and aimed to cover 1 lakh beneficiaries. 1,158 schemes had been completed and irrigation potential of 58,127 hectare created, the scheduled completion date being December 2019, he said.
- On **“Jal Dharo Jal Bharo”**, a unique state Government initiative to conserve rain water in all kinds of water bodies viz. tanks, ponds, reservoirs, canals etc., he pointed out that as of June 2018, 2,44,149 water bodies/ water retention structures have been created in convergence with the Departments of Water Resources Investigation & Development and Panchayat & Rural Development, Govt. of West Bengal.
- He spoke about location specific scheme for comparatively underserved areas of the state, named **“Jalathirtha”** since 2014–15 in 5 Paschimanchal districts of Bankura, Birbhum, Paschim Medinipur, Jhargram & Purulia, which was later extended to Sundarban areas and hilly areas of Darjeeling & Kalimpong. He pointed out that till June 2018, 237 water harvesting tanks and 415 check dams had been constructed to provide irrigation to 37,380 hectares of land.
- He mentioned about a Rs. 3,000 cr. aid from World Bank for developing minor irrigation with command area of 5 hectares and above.
- The Hon’ble Minister spoke about the following priority areas of WRI Department :
 - Installation of minor irrigation to cover additional areas in Bankura, Birbhum, Jhargram, Sundarban areas & hilly areas in the North.
 - Installation of Rain Water Harvesting & Artificial recharge to Ground Water in the drought prone areas and in some blocks with less ground water.
 - Installation of micro irrigation schemes viz. sprinkler, drip etc. to enhance water use efficiency in crop production & continuation of solar based different minor irrigation schemes in some districts under different projects.
 - Implementation of the ‘West Bengal Ground Water Resources (Management Control & Regulation) Act, 2005 for optimal utilization of ground water.

Earlier, in his Welcome Address, **Shri Ramesh Agarwal**, President of the Chamber said that focus should be on “Per Drop More Crop” approach, incentivizing use of efficient irrigation system. He mentioned about “Jal Dharo Jal Bharo” and “Jalathirtha” initiatives and spoke about legal bindings and high cost of ground water. He said that natural recharge is high in West Bengal but only 42% of state’s groundwater resources were being used due to policy restrictions and farmers’ inability to meet the expenses. If farmers could get more access to groundwater, they could cultivate lucrative crops and diversify. He suggested subsidies to improve agricultural productivity.

The Session ended with a hearty Vote of Thanks by **Shri Vishal Jhajharia**, Senior Vice President of the Chamber.

Munmun Banerjee
Assistant Director General