

## **Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on Yamuna Action Plan Project**

Dr.V. Kurian Baby  
Senior Advisor  
Socio-Economic Unit Foundation

### **Relevance**

Ex ante the development objectives of Yamuna Action Plan (YAP) were fully consistent with the national river basin approach in water conservation and improved public health. YAP, as an integral part of the National River Conservation Plan, was incorporated in the VII and VIII five year plans. It also endorses the spirit of the New Delhi Declaration (UN 1990), which include, protection of the environment and safeguarding of health through integrated management of water resources and liquid and solid waste.

At ex post evaluation, the project has consistently been in alignment with the national development goals/ plans (VII to X five year plans), the National Water Policy (NWP, 2002) and the decentralization commitment (73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendment of Indian Constitution). YAP was ahead in recognizing “Dublin principles”, of basin planning, environmental management and stakeholder participation. It reinforced the overarching relationship between water and sanitation and the achievement of poverty reduction targets of the Millennium Development Goals (2000). The institutional design based on decentralization and stakeholder participation (Panchayat Raj Institutes, NGOs, communities, Governments) are valid, relevant and futuristic. As Yamuna provides sources of drinking water for millions of people living in the basin, pollution abatement at source would be a viable option than treating at the end. Though the quality monitoring results are mixed, beneficiaries are better off with the project scenario than without. Despite the implementation delays, relevance/rationale of YAP has not been diminished over the years, but has gained further ground.

### **Sustainability**

The advantage of the project design is in its anchorage with the decentralised governmental framework under the NRCDC, operation and maintenance of the sewage projects the responsibility of respective Public Health Engineering of Haryana, UP Jal Nigam and Delhi Jal Board. Operation and maintenance of sewage treatment plants are contracted out. In terms of technical, financial, institutional and managerial sustainability, the prospects are highly satisfactory on the assumption that, the O&M gap bridging would continued to be met by the governments, and further investments required to arrest/bring down pollution load would continue to be forthcoming. In the non sewer components, there has been concerns of cost recovery / viability, and acceptability. Overall sustainability challenges are: (a) transfer of the O&M responsibilities fully to the respective local bodies; (b) ensure financial sustainability through improved cost recovery; (c) increase average utilization of the treatment capacity in UP; (d) continued communication for demand generation, willingness to pay and to sustain positive behaviour changes; (e) greater involvement of women Self Help Groups and networked local institutions for maintenance and upkeep of non sewer components; (f) emphasis on on-site sanitation and better enforcement of legal provisions by local bodies on solid /liquid waste disposal. Though sustainable development and water resource conservation can coexist, distorted short term priorities continues to dominate stakeholder perceptions. Effective regulatory framework grounded in the polluter pays principle and empowering the local bodies in environmental sanitation would go a long way in making Yamuna live. YAP as a programme has been successful in building blocks towards sustainable river basin planning.