

ABSTRACT - IS HYDROGEOLOGY A SUBORDINATE SCIENCE?

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Under the aegis of economic planning from 1950-1970, India has witnessed a growing use of groundwater resources. The role of groundwater was however downplayed in the water policy and hydro-geologists were not given a place of honor within the administration of both countries. The 1990s witnessed two major changes for the profession of hydro-geologists. First, with the new challenge of sustainable water consumption, the agenda of groundwater institutions have expanded. While hydro-geologists were used to provide technical support to public agencies for groundwater prospecting activities, they have now been imparted with new managing responsibilities. This shift has been sustained by the opening of public service positions to engineering profiles, against a general background of rivalry between 'generalist' and 'specialist' profiles within the administration. Based on qualitative interviews conducted with Indian hydro-geologists working in public administration, this work aims to assess whether those new functions have prompted a better recognition of hydrogeology as a professional jurisdiction. We have interviewed hydro-geologists from the regional renderings of a central institution dedicated to groundwater resources (Central Ground Water Board). At the state level, we have interviewed employees and managers from different institutions that deal with groundwater issues (Public Work Departments and Agricultural Engineering Departments).

The first part of this study shows the selection process of the aspiring hydro-geologists in public service and the work routine of the successful ones. A second part focuses on the way working conditions influence the production of knowledge on groundwater resources. A final part posits that despite the emergence of environmental concern and the subsequent 'managerisation' of working practices, the position of hydrogeology and that of its professionals is still a subordinate one within the state apparatus.

If the range of activities performed by hydro-geologists as groundwater experts has expanded, hydro-geologists have not gained much from these developments in terms of professional recognition. On the one hand, the public service reforms could have institutionalized this profession within public administration. However, hydro-geologists from civil service took the brunt of budget cuts and project-based employment. On the second hand, the specialization of activities has fragmented this group of groundwater experts. The institutionalization process that started in the 1990s stands thus unaccomplished. As of now, our hypothesis is that this specialization of work runs contrary to a broader understanding of groundwater issues. The administrative spectrum of groundwater resources is segmented between different departments and staff that abide by their own water rationale, as many different logics that run into each other. Further research in this area should question how this specialization takes a toll on the principles of integrated water management and also explore how hydro-geologists try to overcome difficulties and reconcile those contradictory water regimes.