A one-day workshop on ‘Facilitating Negotiations over Water Conflicts In Peri-Urban Catchments’ was organized by the Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS), and held at its premises on 14th September 2005. On behalf of the institute and project, Professor Padmini Swaminathan, Director MIDS extended hearty welcome to the gathering and introduced the theme and scope of the NEGOWAT workshop. In her introductory remarks on the workshop, Padmini Swaminathan traced the relevance of the concept and issues of Peri-Urban, urban and rural areas. Her brief introduction also traced that, the NEGOWAT Project encompasses so many issues and reasonable questions in an integrated manner. She emphasised how definition of the concept of Peri-Urban, Urban and Rural areas are important. Her introductory remarks also highlighted the issues of allocation of resources such as who allocates and who holds all the resources. One of the main objectives of the project is to document and analyse impacts of unregulated and unchecked horizontal urban expansion of natural resources. With regard to stakeholder participations, she contended that, how do we sustain all the stakeholders? At last, she urged for a successful discussion of the workshop.

In his presentation on ‘Delivery of services to urban population and emerging conflicts between urban and Peri-urban areas’, Dr. S.Janakarajan highlighted the problem of drinking water scarcity, degradation of coastal ecology, solid wastes management etc. Three basic challenges in the urban sector as pointed out by Dr. Janakarajan are demographic pressure (rural-urban migration), rapid industrial growth and vast urban expansion. All these challenges are inter-linked and leads to the problem of lack of adequate drinking water, sanitation, scarcity of land for urban use, lack of land for urban use, lack of land for housing, mushrooming of slums, open drainage, unhealthy solid waste management and waste water management. As a result, there is pollution of air, water and land. He challenged that, even after investing hundreds of crores in Chennai water supply schemes, the per capita supply to the city’s population is still the lowest (76 liters a day) compared to all big cities in India, that too not assured at all months for all sections of population. There is huge gap between demand and supply of Chennai city’s water. His presentation traced not only problem of urban but also the issues of Peri-urban. He traced that, due to unauthorized settlements, low
lying areas, and highly congested areas, some are being unsurved, which is because of bad urban planning. His presentation also focused on the objectives and performance of the Chennai Metro Water Board with regard to waste water disposal.

In their intensive study on poverty and livelihood analysis, carried out in two sample villages in the Araniar-Kortalayar (AK) basin, Dr Janakarajan found that, groundwater is completely dried, groundwater table has dropped, and farmers were heavily indebted. Again landless agricultural labourers and marginal farmers were migrating. On the contrary, water sellers, traders and manufacturers were in the beneficial group. Non-farm job opportunities in the Peri-urban villages are only incidental and unplanned. The most important question as raised by Dr. Janakarajan is that, ‘what kind of abilities or the enabling environment that the Peri-urban population possesses to diversify their livelihood strategies?’ Groundwater in the peripheral areas was being heavily drawn and an unregulated market had emerged. As a policy option, Dr. Janakarajan suggested for an inter-linked system between rural, Peri-urban and urban, surface & groundwater and land use should be an essential and integral part of the planning system, and need for sustained dialogue among all key stakeholders. Peri-Urban and urban area seem to be seen for single eco-system rather than isolated system.

Janakarajan’s presentation was followed by discussions, questions and observations. One of the participants intended to know the clarifications between privatisation and commercialization of water in the Peri-urban and urban areas. With regard to issues of misuse of water, Janakarajan defended that, it is not mis-use of water but unregulated one. Do the CMDA address the issues of agricultural aspects, wastes and solid? Gilbert argued that, is it providing enabling environment in the Peri-urban areas, by taking the resources from the Peri-urban and again providing them resources in the form of education, health etc.

First technical session was started having three sets of papers. As S.Sundar Raman was absent, his paper on ‘Water Audit: An exploratory analysis in a Peri-urban village’ was presented by S.Janakarajan. His presentation depicted the balance sheet of water availability in a village study looking demand and supply aspects, and found huge deficit of water. The project teams plan to use this test (methodology) for Taluk and district level later on. In his paper on ‘Poverty and Livelihood Analysis’ in Peri-urban villages, Janakarajan revealed that, existing surface water bodies have been either neglected or encroached upon. As a result many farmers have become indebted due to heavy investments in well irrigation without much return. The project covered 24 villages in the lower Palar basin and 41 villages in the Kortalayar basin. He argued that, there is declining in groundwater status and high gap between extraction and recharge in the study villages. Again with regard to cultivation status in the study villages, agricultural activities have declined quite drastically in the past couple of decades. He contended that, the main source of the beginning of conflict in the study villages were 1983 ordinance, continuous pumping of groundwater and sand mining. The key observations is that, the villagers noted how water meant for irrigation was being transported for urban use, which led to competing demand for water from both villages and the city. Land use patterns were changing as farm lands are turning for urban use.

He traced that, a subjective question was posed to the respondents. Besides pollution and degradation of natural resources, the water exploitation led to a decline of agricultural employment led to livelihood problems. Industries relocating to such areas also consumed water and changed the land use patterns. Unemployment has become a major problem with decline in agricultural activities. Landless labourers have little option except to migrate to the city and adding pressure to the strained urban infrastructure.
These sets of paper were followed by discussions and observations. By chairing the session Mohana Krishnan Chairman, Cauvery Technical Cell contended that, the two major research problems are poor governance and bad planning. He said that, next world war will be on war of water. He suggested that, the concept of Peri-urban, urban and rural must be defined in terms of scientific planning. He contended that, can we think some sort of authority for entire Madras area into inclusion of one Peri-urban? As demand is more than the availability, ground water mining is increasing. He traced that, as Tamil Nadu rainfall is undependable, there is need for recharging of groundwater and water harvesting. Dattatri of SUSTAIN emphasised that, settlement as the basic module of development. By giving the instances of China case, Dattatri argued that, settlement base planning rather than urban based planning approach should be given priority. Regional approach is better than urban approach.

In their joint paper on ‘Chennai water laws: Prospects and Problems’ Geeta Lakshmi and S.Janakarajan presented the objectives and issues of intricacies of Chennai water laws. Broadly, it focused on the current water concerns of the city and Peri-urban areas, different water laws, background of the main features of 1983 ordinance and provision of 2003 Act. Their presentation also highlighted various offences and penalties, equity issues and property rights.

Their presentation was followed discussion, question and comments. Sara Ahmed commented the question of renegotiating democracy. By quoting Tamil Nadu Water Development Board, she contended that, how do we make the accountable? Again she emphasised that, whether the role of all NGO, civil society addresses the question of decentralization. She urged the need of space for bottom-up- approach. One of the participant contended that, there is need for renegotiating democracy by bringing academician and NGO together. Olivia from French Institute of Pondichery traced the pumping of drinking water in Peri-urban areas. At last, Mohana Krishnan concluded that, our democracy presently in the infancy stage.

Post-lunch technical session II was having two sets of papers. In their joint paper on ‘Solid, liquid and bio-medical waste management in Chennai’ Geeta Lakshmi and S.Janakarajan presented Municipal solid waste generation, the generation of garbage and various environmental policies. It also emphasised on sewage treatment plants and the major reason for area unsewered. There is inefficient sewage treatment management. In Chennai, 532mld of sewage water is generated. There is no proper management and treatment process for sewage water disposal. All the water is let into the waterways of the city, temple tanks in and around the city and Peri-urban areas and sea. Around 50mld untreated sewage is let into Pallikaranai marshland on a daily basis. Untreated sewage in Pallikaranai resulted in heavy ground water contamination. Un-segregated bio-medical waste gets dump along with solid waste in Peri-urban areas. By intervening the presentation, Gilbert commented that, whether any environmental impact assessment study has been done or not.

The main purpose of their presentation on ‘Media responses to Peri-urban problems in Chennai’ G.Jothi and V. Prabahar Gnanakkn argued, how local newspaper, media, and public awareness responding all the Peri-urban problems, after more in 1990s as compared to 1980s. Whole idea of their presentation is to document all the media responses into an integrated document. Broadly their presentation highlighted the major issues related to Peri-urban area, sub-urban areas that were being mostly published in different daily regional and English news paper such as The Hindu, The New Indian Express, Dinamalar, Dinamani, Dinatandi.
etc. They concluded that, the media is playing an optimistic role in focusing environmental related issues in Chennai, suburbs and Peri-urban areas. The media’s reports and photographs were evidenced in the court of law. They argued that media were creating awareness among the public in many problem like tank encroachment, sand mining, industrial and sewage pollution, rain water harvesting, economic usage of water etc. Their presentation also highlighted that, in Peri-urban areas people were started to protect water bodies, ground water and also their natural resources.

In the third technical session, Janakarajan addressed the Stake holder’s analyses in the context of natural resource management in Peri-urban areas to pave the way for participatory planning. Broadly, his presentation highlighted on meaning, objectives, strength and weaknesses and various steps involved in Stake holder’s analyses. By giving the explanation of Cultural theory framework (Thomson; 2001), Janakarajan explained the four categories of society viz hierarchist, marketer, egalitarian and fatalists group. His presentation was followed by discussions and comments. Sara Ahmed argued that, all the above four categories are not properly classified. On the other hand, Gilbert raised the question such as, who are the actual stakes in fatalists groups? He argued that farmers were not getting equal power in Multi Stakeholder Dialogue (MSD). By defending the above question, Janakarajan disagreed with Gilbert’s view. Gomathinayagam of Anna University said regarding urban water user. Parameswaran Chief Engineer argued that, Government is not the member of stakeholders. He contended that, Government may be facilitator or provider, and other users should be stakeholder member. Disagreed with Parameswaran view, Janakarajan contended that Government is the member of stakeholder. Dattatri made it also clarified that, all users are stakeholder’s member.

The final technical session was on feedback from participants and on panel discussions by two eminent panelists Dattatri and Palanidurai, Member Planning Commission. In his presentation, Dattatri emphasised on eight important issues such as; i) drinking water priority, ii)sanitation, iii) water rights and property rights, iv) source development responsibility and distribution responsibility, v) maintenance mechanism, vi) use of decentralised technology rather than centralized mechanism, vii) finance of funding mechanism and viii) requirement of alternative institutional mechanism. At last he concluded that, he is interested in the findings of the two case village studies. With regard to the concept of definition of Peri-urban, Palanidurai traced that, it is emerging as geographical identity which is unplanned, unregulated and unscientific. At last, he remarked that, all the policy recommendations, suggestions and major findings of the NEGOWAT project may be a torch for the Government to have a certain vision. The workshop suggested that rural, Peri-urban and urban areas must be viewed as an inter-linked system as fragmented approach would intensify the problems and contribute to the destruction of environment and livelihood options of people in rural and Peri-urban areas. Besides participatory approach of all stakeholders, including the Government and people to resolve the issue, efforts must be made to preserve water bodies in and around the city.

The workshop closed with a vote of thanks proposed by S. Janakarajan. Regarding the future activities, he hoped that the final report will be brought out in 2007 and all the papers will be circulated for comments and suggestion. By using Bayesian Network and GIS for all water bodies, the project trying to explore local water supply options.