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Shiney Verghese responds

Mr. Ghosh's letter is extremely welcome. To deal first with “the substance,” I am glad that Mr. Ghosh has emphasised that CEEW's “research advocates strengthening the government's capability in water management, not handing it over to the private sector.” On this broad principle we are in agreement. But as critics of current water policies in India and elsewhere have said on several occasions, the devil lies in the details. It is entirely possible that the strengthening of government capacity might also work to strengthen already powerful groups — whether corporate houses or agribusinesses. This is why my article was concerned with particular implications of specific steps.

To turn now to the “process.” Here, Mr. Ghosh defends CEEW against charges that I have not levelled against it. For one, he insists that CEEW is not a member of WRG. But the article does not say that it is. The article points rather to the convergence between the two, and to the fact that WRG lists CEEW as a collaborator. This was indicated in a four-page document, on Water Resources Group Phase 2, which was available on the World Economic Forum website as of February 9, 2012. There is documented evidence that CEEW has been a collaborator of WRG; for example, the water dialogues organised in 2010 by CEEW and the Confederation of Indian Industry in New Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore were part of WRG Phase 2 plans.

I also agree with Mr. Ghosh that CEEW did not directly influence the formulation of the Draft water policy by the Ministry of Water Resources, India. CEEW's input was to the National Planning Commission, as the article clearly states. As Mr. Ghosh says, there is need for more dialogue and less polemics. Such a dialogue should focus on the substantive issues involved — in this case whether the Draft National Water Policy, as well as initiatives such as those by the WRG or CEEW, make water into an economic good, and do so in ways that adversely affect the most marginal groups. I hope this kind of dialogue can contribute to a more informed debate on a water policy that benefits all users.

(The writer is a Minneapolis-based analyst working on global water policy initiatives at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, a U.S. NGO. Email: svarghese@iatp.org)