



Water: Leaving No One Behind

On **March 22** of every year, World observes **World Water Day**, the theme of which, this year, is “Leaving no one behind”, with the motto - 'Whoever you are, wherever you are, water is your human right'.

Water

- **The UN defines safe water** as that which is free from contamination, accessible on the premises and available when needed.
- Water is crucial for human survival, healthy ecosystems, socio-economic development and also for food and energy production.
- Though nearly 70% of the world is covered by water, only 2.5% of it is fresh water.
- Just less than 1% of the freshwater is easily accessible in lakes and rivers.
- Of the remaining fresh water, one-third is underground water supplies or well springs while the other two-thirds are locked away in ice caps or glaciers.

Water Discrimination

- **Age and Gender are the foremost reason for discrimination when it comes to accessing clean water.**
 - Women and Children are the worst affected population. In fact, children are more vulnerable to diseases due to dirty water.
- Other reasons for water discrimination include race, ethnicity, religion, birth, caste, language and nationality.
- Certain people are particularly disadvantaged due to disability, age, health and economic and social status.
- Environmental degradation, climate change, population growth, conflict, forced displacement and migration are also some reasons due to which marginalized groups of society suffer.

Global Water Crisis

- 844 million people lack access to clean water. Out of this, 159 million people depend on surface water to meet their basic needs.
- Over 2 billion people live without access to improved sanitation.
- Scarcity of clean water is also a health crisis as statistics indicate that a child dies every two minutes from a water related disease.
- **Each year, at least one million people are killed by water, sanitation and hygiene related diseases.**
- In 2017, water played a major role in conflict in at least 45 countries, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa.
 - Yemen had the most water related conflicts with at least 28 individual events reported.
- By 2040, it is predicted that 33 countries are likely to face extremely high water stress including 15 in the Middle East, most of Northern Africa, Pakistan, Turkey and Afghanistan.
 - Many including India, China, South Africa, U.S.A and Australia will also face high water stress.

Day Zero Instances

- **Day Zero is a situation when taps in a region start running dry.**
- The Capital of South Africa 'Cape Town', last year, launched a countdown to the day when tap water would be cut-off to millions of residents as a result of a three year drought.
- Brazil's Sao Paulo faced its own Day Zero in 2015. The city turned off its water supply for 12 hours a day forcing many businesses and industries to shut down.
- In 2008, Barcelona in Spain had to import tankers full of fresh water from France.

Water Crisis in India

- **India tops the list of countries with the most number of people living with water scarcity.**
- As many as one billion people in India live in areas with physical water scarcity, of which 600 million are in areas of high to extreme water stress.
- Approximately 330 million people from 302 districts were affected by droughts in 2016.
- Over 21% of the country's diseases are water related. In 2015, India lost over 1 lakh children under the age of five to diarrheal diseases.
- **As per a report by NITI Aayog, Bengaluru will soon be among one of the 11 cities in the world to run out of ground water.**
 - The report also states that the 'Day Zero' will hit Bengaluru and 20 other major cities (including Delhi) in India by the year 2020 affecting an estimated 100 million people.

India-Specific Reasons

- **Though India receives about 1.3m rainfall every year but distribution of the same over space and time is a problem.**
 - India gets about 95% of its rainfall during monsoons.
 - North East India receives about 30ms of rainfall every year, one of the highest in the world.
 - But parts of Rajasthan and some other parts of India receive less than 200mm, making these places one of the driest places in the world.
 - Thus distribution of water over time and geography of India becomes difficult.
- Overexploitation and contamination of groundwater.
- Lot of lakes, rivers and streams getting drying up.
- Pollution of surface water.
- Lack of efficiency in water management.

Impact

- Without clean easily accessible water, families and communities remain logged in **poverty for generations.**
 - Children drop out of school and parents struggle to make a living.
 - Women often bear the burden of carrying water for their families for an estimated 200 million hours each day.
- Shrinking reservoirs in Morocco, India, Iraq and Spain can spark the next day zero water crisis.
- Deaths due to water and sanitation related diseases.

U.N. Initiatives to Save Water

- The United Nations Water Conference (1977), the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981-1990), the International Conference on Water and the Environment (1992) and the Earth Summit (1992) - all focused on the vital resource, Water.
- The 'Water for Life' International Decade for Action 2005-2015 helped around 1.3 billion people in developing countries gain access to safe drinking water and drove progress on sanitation as part of the effort to meet the Millennium Development Goals.
- **The most recent initiative is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** that aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of water for all by the year 2030.

Water Conservation - Solutions

- **Reusing Water**
 - Water left after washing vegetables can be used for gardening.
 - Water drained from RO filters at home can be used for mopping the floor.
- **Preventing Wastage**
 - Not leaving taps running while brushing.
 - Aerators save nearly 35-40% of water a minute when compared to normal taps.
 - Doing laundry when washing machine is fully loaded.
 - Trying bathing with one bucket of water instead of taking shower or installing water-saving shower heads to cut down 80% of water usage.
 - Installation of composting toilets.
 - Checking for leakages in the house.
- **Ground water level** can be increased by using Artificial Recharge Techniques.
- **Rainwater Harvesting Systems** in houses and localities can fight water shortage.
- Cultivating less water intensive crops is another solution. Also, use of drip and sprinkler systems for irrigation will help in conservation of water.
- Avoiding usage of those synthetic ingredients that contaminate water bodies. Water Purification is another solution for conservation of water.

Within the next 50 years, the world population will increase by 40-50%. This growth coupled with industrialization and urbanization will result in an increased demand for water. To meet this demand, people need to understand that water is life and should take such steps that will help in conservation of water. Government of different countries need to ensure efficient management and storage of water besides increasing tree cover in their respective regions.

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