



India's Water Crisis & Women

Why in News

India is **water-stressed due to changing weather patterns and repeated [droughts](#)**. And the worst **sufferers of this crisis are mostly women**.

- Water scarcity in India is expected to worsen as the **overall population is expected to increase to 1.6 billion by the year 2050**.

Key Points

▪ Water Crisis:

- Although **India has 16% of the world's population**, the country possesses only **4% of the world's freshwater resources**.
- In recent times, the water crisis in India has become very critical, **affecting millions of people across India**.
- As many as **256 of 700 districts in India** have reported '**critical**' or 'overexploited' groundwater levels according to the most recent [Central Ground Water Board data](#) (from 2017).
- Three-fourths of India's rural families **lack access to piped, drinkable water and must rely on unsafe sources**.
- India has become the **world's largest extractor of groundwater**, accounting for 25% of the total. Some **70% of our water sources** are contaminated and our major rivers are dying because of pollution.

▪ Causes of Water Crisis:

◦ Population Growth:

- There is **insufficient water per person** as a result of population growth.
- The total amount of **usable water in India has been estimated to be between 700 to 1,200 billion cubic meters (bcm)**
 - A country is considered water-stressed if it has less than 1,700 cubic meters per person per year.

◦ Poor Water Quality:

- Water in most rivers in India is largely **not fit for drinking**, and in many stretches not even fit for bathing.
- Poor water quality is the result of **insufficient and delayed investment in urban water-treatment facilities**.
- Moreover, **industrial effluent standards are not enforced** because the state pollution control boards have inadequate technical and human resources.

◦ Dwindling Groundwater Supplies:

- There is dwindling groundwater supplies due to **over-extraction by farmers**.
- **Deficient rain** in some areas is also **depleting ground water**.

- **Unsustainable consumption:**

- Wells, ponds and tanks are drying up as groundwater resources come under **increasing pressure due to over-reliance and unsustainable consumption.**
- Unequal distribution of water, **contamination/depletion of local water bodies** due to pollution and no proper water treatment facility augment the water crisis in India.

- **Impact on Women:**

- **Vulnerability of Women:**

- The crisis of water only puts them at a higher risk of vulnerability. Fetching water in India has been perceived as a **woman's job for centuries.**
- Women, especially in the rural areas, **walk miles to collect water from the nearest source.**

- **Reduced Access to Sanitation:**

- Their marginalisation is compounded by the **indignity and insecurity** of not having a private spot to fulfil their toilet needs.
- This whole system of women being forced to be water carriers leads to them having very less time for themselves. This further **reduces access to clean sanitation, better physical and mental health of women.**

- **Water-Wives:**

- The entire water management by women has led to **polygamy in one drought-prone village of Maharashtra.** This involves having more than one spouse to collect water. The arrangement is termed as '**water wives**'.

- This is undoubtedly an example of regressive thinking — of women being seen as **substitutes for water pipes or tankers.**

- **Related Government Initiatives:**

- [Jal Kranti Abhiyan.](#)
- [National Water Mission.](#)
- [National Rural Drinking Water Programme.](#)
- [NITI Aayog Composite Water Management Index.](#)
- [Jal Jeevan Mission.](#)
- [Jal Shakti Abhiyan.](#)
- [Atal Bhujal Yojana.](#)

Way Forward

- Addressing women's water, sanitation and hygiene requirements is a **critical driver in attaining gender equity** and unlocking the potential of half of the world's population. The water crisis is a women's issue and **feminists need to talk about it.**
- The water levels of the **floodplain aquifers** need to be monitored scrupulously to be well above the river water level to avoid contamination by river water.
- Floodplains can be secured by **planting organic food forests or fruit forests** which don't demand or consume much water.
- In water management, corporations must play a more active role in using their [Corporate Social Responsibility \(CSR\)](#) efforts towards innovation and conservation of water and harness water recharge.

[Source: DTE](#)

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