



Marathwada Water Crisis

According to some economists and water academics, the water crisis in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra is the outcome of 'policy failure'.

Key Points

- Last, year, the region received 300mm rainfall which is sufficient to sustain the population of Marathwada and enough for one crop.
- But, mismanagement of water resources coupled with four decades of incessant 'water mining', had led the groundwater table across the Marathwada region to decline precipitously to the point where rejuvenating it had become difficult.
- According to data by the Groundwater Surveys and Development Agency, the water table had dropped alarmingly in 70 of the 76 talukas of Marathwada, with more than 25 reporting a drop of more than two metres.

Factors Behind the Water Crisis

- One major **factor responsible for the water crisis is the change in crop pattern** to one which is not congruent with the agro-climatic characteristics of this region.
- Earlier, the main crops cultivated here used to be cereal and oilseeds. These crops were not only conducive to Marathwada's arid climate but were drought-resistant and led to moisture harvesting.
- But now, the predominant crops here are soybean and Bt Cotton, which dominate more than 80% of Marathwada's cultivable land. These crops, coupled with the lure of easy profits from sugarcane, have led the farmers and the citizens to the edge of the current hydrological disaster.
- Another factor responsible for the crisis is the **diversion of water to the industries and sugar factories**.
- Sugar factories in Marathwada were operational despite the mounting water crisis. To produce 1 kg of sugar, about 2,000 litres of water are required.
- There was also no significant effort was made by the State to curtail the water supply to the industries.
- Moreover, there has been **no significant effort at harvesting water** or replenishing the groundwater table.

Way Forward

- There are provisions within the **Maharashtra Irrigation Act of 1976** wherein the government can notify people in the command area not to go in for water-intensive crops like sugarcane in the case of acute water scarcity.
- Cultivation of **drought-resistant crops like oilseeds and pulses** should be encouraged.
- People should be encouraged to adopt **water harvesting practices** and watershed should be developed under the MGNREGA programme to replenish the groundwater table.

