

AIR Spotlight - World Water Day

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panellists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, World Water Day is discussed.

Participants –

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Context:

This article underlines the issue of the water crisis in India and measures taken by the Indian government for water conservation in the light of World Water Day 2022.

World Water Day 2022:

- World Water Day is observed on March 22 to raise awareness about the importance of water and educate people to conserve it.
- A principal focus of World Water Day is to support the achievement of United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 6, which is to ensure safe water and sanitation for all by 2030.
- **Theme:** The theme of World Water Day this year is "Groundwater, making the invisible visible".

Water Crisis in India:

- India has a population of 16 percent of the world's population but only 4% of the world's freshwater resources.
- India has surpassed China as the world's largest extractor of groundwater, accounting for 25% of global extraction.
- Our water sources are contaminated in 70% of cases, and our major rivers are dying as a result of pollution.
- According to the 2018 Composite Water Management Index (CWMI), by 2050, 6% of economic GDP will be lost, and by 2030, water demand will exceed available supply.
- According to a UNICEF report, less than half of India's population has access to properly managed drinking water. It also claims that India is home to over 19% of the world's population without access to safe drinking water.

Water Action Decade: The UN General Assembly has declared 2018 to 2028, the Water Action Decade, which addresses the increased global pressure on water resources, and exacerbated risk of droughts and floods.

'Water in India: Situation and Prospects' Report: This report was brought out by UNICEF and Food and Agriculture Organization has highlighted the water crisis in India and recommended measuring available water resources as the calculations per capita water availability do not include disparity in water allocation and access.

Government Measures for Water Conservation: New Water Security Plan

State Subject	Water being a State subject, steps for augmentation, conservation and efficient management of water resources are primarily undertaken by the respective State Governments.
Jal Shakti Abhiyan-I (JSA-I)	Under the Jal Shakti Abhiyan, officers, groundwater experts and scientists from the Government of India worked with State and district officials in these districts to promote water conservation and water resource management.
Atal Bhujal Yojana	This scheme focuses on community participation, demand-side interventions and convergence of ongoing schemes for sustainable groundwater management in seven States – Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
Sahi Fasal	National Water Mission had started a campaign “Sahi Fasal” to nudge farmers to favour agricultural crops which consume less water and to use water more efficiently in agriculture.
Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP)	Under Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP), a component of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana , Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR) of Water Bodies Scheme was launched which aims to revive irrigation potential by improvement and restoration of water bodies.
Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)	This scheme focuses on the development of basic urban infrastructure in the Mission cities in the sectors of water supply, sewerage & septage management, stormwater drainage, green spaces & parks and non-motorized urban transport.
Catch the Rain	National Water Mission’s (NWM) campaign “Catch The Rain ” is to nudge the states and stakeholders to create appropriate Rain Water Harvesting Structures (RWHS) suitable to the climatic conditions and subsoil strata before monsoon.

Challenges

- **Overexploitation:** India is staring at acute water scarcity in the coming future due to overexploitation, leading to a substantial drop in groundwater levels across India.
- **Climate change:** The unintended shift in monsoon patterns results in extended dry periods intermittently with short heavy rains within the monsoon season. Climate change threatens the longevity of water sources.
- **Structural issues threaten Water security:**

- Inefficient management, contamination, and outdated policies are affecting millions of people's access to water as groundwater levels decline, threatening India's long-term water security.
- India's water crisis is exacerbated by structural inefficiencies, a lack of political will, and unrelenting exploitation.
- **Agricultural constraints:**
 - Irrigation practises in the agricultural sector have been unregulated and inefficient for decades.
 - Furthermore, excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides, as well as untreated run-off water, contaminated water sources.
 - It also harmed the region's soil fertility and environment.
- **Social Impact on Women:**
 - The crisis of water puts women in India at a higher risk of vulnerability.
 - Fetching water in India has been perceived as a woman's job for centuries.
- **Social Discrimination:**
 - Lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation can be related to economic, political and social power imbalances, and discrimination against certain groups or communities.
- **Wetlands degradation:**
 - India is losing wetlands at the rate of 2-3% each year. The drivers of this decline are overfishing, agriculture, deforestation, introduced species, climate change, water drainage, land encroachment and urban development.

Pani Panchayat in Odisha:

The pani panchayats of Odisha are farmer-led organizations tasked with water management and equitable distribution on a local level. Their main responsibility is to ensure that no hectare of irrigated land is 'water-deprived or water-denied.' Pani panchayats were successful in minimizing conflict and ensuring that no single block was without water by empowering farmers. Penalties and fines are in place for those who misuse the supply.

Recommendations:

- Water harvesting networks should also be set up, and public awareness campaigns launched to encourage people to conserve water.
 - For example, Rajasthan's Jalsagar project, where rainwater is collected into tanks during monsoon months and used for agricultural purposes when it does not rain enough.
- Interlinking of rivers can supply water to dry regions, with the added benefit of harnessing water wasted in floods.
- Agricultural practices must shift from low-yield crops, which use up large quantities of water, to high-yield crops, which use less water.
- New water purification technologies like smart water purifiers and auto-maintenance systems are showing the ray of hope to solve the water crisis.

- The concept of inter-State virtual water transfer also needs emphasis, as the States with lower availability resources end up being the net exporters of virtual water to water surplus States.
- Gender and water issues need to be aggregated and taken up as a priority by the state for any progress to be made in mainstreaming gender in water resources management.

