

A Study on Water Scarcity and Security in India

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Abstract: Water is an integral part of Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Goal 6 focuses on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). India is not a water deficit country, but due to severe neglect and lack of monitoring of water resources development projects, several regions in the country experience water stress from time to time. Further neglect in this sector will lead to water scarcity during the next 1-2 decades. It is therefore necessary to prevent this crisis by making best use of the available technologies and resources to conserve the existing water resources, convert them into utilisable form and make efficient use of them for agriculture, industrial production and human consumption. Imposing regulatory measures to prevent the misuse of water and introducing rewards and punishment to encourage judicious use of water, will be helpful to conserve water. Finally, awareness and orientation of all the water users to change their lifestyle to conserve water, can help the country to tide over the water crisis in the future. The challenge is manageable provided we have favourable policies and mechanisms to persuade our people to change their lifestyle.

Key Words: Water, Sustainable Development, India, World, Issues, Challenges, WASH, SDG

INTRODUCTION

Water is an integral part of Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Goal 6 focuses on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). Water is life because plants and animals cannot live without water. Water is needed to ensure food security, feed livestock, maintain organic life, take up industrial production and to conserve the biodiversity and environment. Hence, there is no life without water. Earth is the only planet, so far known to have water and this makes it fit for human living. However, with reckless abuse and increasing demand, due to growing population and unsustainable lifestyle, many countries are facing severe water crisis. In the absence of suitable corrective measures, many developing countries including India, will have to face crisis of food and water security in the near future.

Although, India is not a water poor country, due to growing human population, severe neglect and over-exploitation of this resource, water is becoming a scarce commodity. India is more vulnerable because of the growing population and in-disciplined lifestyle. This calls for immediate attention by the stakeholders to make sustainable use of the available water resources.

70% of the earth surface is covered with water, which amounts to 1400 million cubic kilometres ($m\ km^3$). However, 97.5% of this water being sea water, it is salty. Fresh water availability is only $35\ m\ km^3$ and only 40% of this can be used by human beings. Out of the total fresh water, 68.7% is frozen in ice caps, 30% is stored underground and only 0.3% water is available on the surface of the earth. Out of the surface water, 87% is stored in lakes, 11% in swamp and 2% in rivers (Anon. 2006).

Long before, when the population was low and lifestyle was simple, water was available in plenty and was considered as a free resource. However, with growing demand for water and depletion of the available water, assured supply of good quality water is becoming a growing concern. As the water resources are not evenly distributed, across different continents, some countries have surplus water while many other countries are already facing scarcity of water. Skewed growth of population in different continents is further adding to this crisis. Among various continents, Asia has 36% of the available fresh water reserves, with over 60% of the world population where water is a scarce commodity. Compared to Asia, Africa is in a better situation, where 13% of the population has access to 11% of the fresh water reserves. Australia and Oceania have plenty of water with 1% population owning 5% of the fresh water reserves, followed by North and Central America, with 8% population and 15% water reserves and South America with 6% global population and 26% fresh water reserves. Since generations, the pattern of water use in different countries is mostly dependent on their culture, lifestyle and industrial development, as availability of water was not a serious concern. Table 1 presents the per capita water use in different continents. The data highlights a close correlation between economic prosperity and water use.

Table 1
Per Capita Water Use

<i>Continents</i>	<i>Per Capita Water Use (m^3/yr)</i>
Africa	245
Asia	519
North and C. America	1861
South America	478
Europe	1280
USSR (Former)	713

Major consumption of water is for agriculture, industrial production and domestic purposes, apart from being used for fishery, hydro-power generation, transportation and maintaining biodiversity and ecological

balance. The proportion of water used for agriculture and industries varies from country to country depending on the lifestyle, extent of industrial development and water use efficiency as presented in Table 2. Developing countries are using comparatively less water for agriculture and more for industrial and domestic purposes, while the developing countries in Asia and Africa use 80-90% of the water for agriculture and only 5-12% of the water for industrial use. This is reflecting on inefficient use of water in agriculture and poor investments in industrial development. With the urbanisation and industrial development, the usage of water is likely to increase in the coming years as presented in Table 3. While the per capita water use in India will increase from the current level of 99 litres per day to 167 litres per day in 2050, the per capita consumption in USA will reduce from 587 litres to 484 litres per day in 2050. By then, India will be the highest water demanding country, needing 2413 litres/day, while China and USA would require 2192 billion litres and 1167 billion litres respectively.

Table 2
Current Water Usage

Usage (%)	World	Europe	Africa	India
Agriculture	69	33	88	83
Industry	23	54	5	12
Domestic	8	13	7	5

Table 3
Future Water Usage

Year	Agriculture	Industry	Domestic	Total	Per Capita
India	Billion Lit/Day				Lit/Day
2000	1658	115	93	1866	88.9
2050	1745	441	227	2413	167.0
China					
2000	1024	392	105	1521	82.7
2050	1151	822	219	2192	155.4
USA					
2000	542	605	166	1313	582.7
2050	315	665	187	1167	484.6

Water Resources in India

India is blessed with good rainfall well distributed over 5-6 months in the year. The average annual rainfall in the country is 1170 mm with a wide range between 100 mm in desert areas of Rajasthan to 10000 mm in Cherapunji. The total available sweet water in the country is 4000 billion m³ per annum. Out of this, over 1047 billion m³ water is lost due to

evaporation, transpiration and runoff, reducing the available water to 1953 billion m³ and the usable water to 1123 billion m³. It is disturbing to note that only 18% of the rainwater is used effectively while 48% enters the river and most of which reaches the ocean. Out of the total usable water, 728 billion m³ is contributed from surface water and 395 billion m³ is contributed by replenishable ground water. Against the above supply, the water consumed during the year 2006 in India was 829 billion m³ which is likely to increase to 1093 billion m³ in 2025 and 1047 billion m³ in 2050, as estimated by the Government of India (2009). As the potential for increasing the volume of utilisation of water is hardly 5-10%, India is bound to face severe scarcity of water in the near future.

While water for consumption is most crucial, it is equally important to provide water for irrigation to increase the food production and livestock husbandry, to ensure food security for the increasing population. Growing population, as everyone is aware, is a serious concern as it will create further burden on the per capita water availability in the future. As can be seen in Table 4, the per capita water availability in 1951 was 5177 m³ per year when the total population was only 361 million. In 2001, as the population increased to 1027 million, the per capita water availability reduced drastically to 1820 m³ per year. By 2025, the per capita water availability will further drop down to 1341 m³ and to 1140 m³ in 2050. Based on the average requirement of water for various purposes, the situation is considered as water stress condition when the per capita water availability ranges from 1000 to 1700 m³ per year and it is considered water scarcity when the availability reduces to 1000 m³ per year. As the water available within the country varies widely as a result of rainfall, ground water reserve and proximity to river basins, most of the Indian States will have reached the water stress condition by 2020 and water scarcity condition by 2025. This would further hamper the food security, as the scarcity of water will directly suppress agricultural production.

Table 4
Per capita water availability in India

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population (Million)</i>	<i>Per capita water availability (m³/year)</i>
1951	361	5177
1955	395	4732
1991	846	2209
2001	1027	1820
2025	1394	1341
2050	1640	1140

Source: Government of India, 2009.

Presently, in spite of good rainfall distribution, the country is unable to make good use of rain water, because of lack of awareness and poor infrastructure to construct dams and reservoirs. As a result, only about 35-40% of the cropping area receives irrigation to take 1-2 crops in a year. Out of the total cultivable area of 182 m ha, only 140 m ha are under net cultivation and of this, 62 m ha are under irrigation. There is further potential to increase the area under irrigation to 140 m ha, 76 m ha through surface water and 64 m ha by using ground water. So far, the irrigation potentials have already been created to cover 107 m ha, although they are not utilised effectively. It is estimated that effective area under irrigation by 2025 will be 76 million ha, although the Government of India is estimating to cover 104 million ha. Ground water is the major source of irrigation and this trend will continue. By 2025, 60 million ha will be irrigated by using ground water and by 2050, the area under ground water will increase to 70 million ha. In 2000, the area under canal irrigation was 17 million ha, which will increase to 27 million ha by 2050. There is further scope to increase the potential by 35 million ha, by inter-linking the rivers and harnessing 36 billion m³ through artificial recharging of ground water (Government of India, 2009).

Apart from irrigation, many rivers in India are also used for generating hydro power. Out of the estimated hydro power potential of 1,50,000 mw, only 21% has been developed so far and additional 10% power generation projects are under implementation. Presently, the country is facing many difficulties in further tapping the potential, due to difficult sites, forest conservation concerns, inter State issues, poor implementation and lack of commitment. It is also possible to develop multipurpose projects for power generation and irrigation which can improve the project viability, while increasing water supply.

Pollution of water resources is another major concern which is affecting the water supply as well as human health conditions. Although, 5% of the total water is used for domestic use, 27% of the villages and 4 to 6% urban population in India do not have access to drinking water. Apart from inadequate supply of water, there is a serious concern about the quality of water, which is severely affecting the health. It is reported that over 70% of the water consumed by rural population in India does not meet the WHO standards. It has been reported that 80% of rural illnesses, 21% of transmissible diseases and 20% of deaths among children in the age group of 5 years, are directly linked to consumption of unsafe water.

The major causes of water pollution are discharge of untreated sewage and industrial effluent into rivers, excessive use of fertilisers in agriculture and contamination of ground water with salts and minerals present in the

lower soil profiles. It is estimated that in New Delhi alone, 36 million tons of sewage is generated everyday of which only 50% is treated and the rest is let out into the Yamuna river directly. Same is the situation in other cities. Only 31% of the sewage water generated in 23 major cities is treated and the rest is polluting 18 major rivers in the country. Most of the rivers in the country are also contaminated by fluorides, nitrites and several toxic metals. Presently, over 66 million people are suffering from fluorosis after consuming water containing more than 1.5 ppm fluoride. Poor sanitation both in rural and urban areas, is another reason for pollution of drinking water sources. Only 30% rural population has access to toilet facilities while 65% urban people use toilets. Nitrates and harmful germs from human excreta flow and percolate down to contaminate the water tanks and open wells.

There is no precise estimate available about the extent of ground water polluted by excessive application of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. The problem is not only that of application of higher doses of fertilisers but also excessive use of water for irrigation. As a result, most of the well water used for drinking in irrigated areas is polluted. Excessive irrigation has also been causing further damage to soil productivity, as the water reaching lower layers of soil and the salts present in this region are dissolved in water. Subsequently, these salts come to the top soil through capillary action. Such soils with high concentrations turn into sodic wastelands, unfit for agricultural production. Presently, over 9 million ha fertile irrigated lands have turned into sodic wastelands and the water in these areas will have high salt concentration, unfit for human consumption as well as for agricultural production. As the people living in these villages are helplessly consuming such hard water, the incidences of illnesses are high.

Drivers of Water Usage

The demand for water in India is steeply increasing because of the following reasons (Amarasinghe, *et al.* 2007):

- The primary reason is population as India's population which was 1.3 billion in 2005 is expected to rise to 1.66 billion in 2050.
- There is also going to be a major impact on development in the form of urbanisation. In 2007, 28.2% of the Indian population was living in urban areas and the urban population is expected to increase to 55.2% by 2050.
- The per capita income of Indians will increase from \$468 in 2007 to \$6735 in 2050.
- Increased industrialisation will demand more water as its contribution to GDP will increase from 29.1% in 2000 to 40% by

2050. Thus, the demand for water will increase from 30 billion m³ in 2000 to 161 billion m³ in 2050.

- The agriculture development will be more on water intensive cash crops and there will be 80% increase in the demand for water by 2050.

It is therefore necessary to address the bottlenecks affecting the water supply in India.

Challenges in Water Sector

The water supply in India is going to be a serious challenge due to various reasons. The most serious concern is the growing population which is likely to increase to 1.66 billion by 2050. With the increasing population, the annual food requirement in the country will exceed 250 million tons. The total demand for grains will increase to 375 million tons including grain for feeding livestock. With the growth in the National GDP, at 6.8% per annum, during the period from 2000 to 2025 and 6.0% per annum, during the years 2025 to 2050, the per capita income is bound to increase by 5.5% per annum. This will increase the demand for food. While the per capita consumption of cereals will decrease by 9%, 47% and 60%, with respect to rice, coarse cereals and maize, the per capita consumption of sugar, fruits and vegetables will increase by 32%, 65% and 78% respectively, during the period from 2000 to 2050. This will create an additional demand for water. The requirement of water for livestock will rise from 2.3 billion m³ in 2000 to 2.8 billion m³ in 2025 and 3.2 billion m³ in 2050.

Over-exploitation of ground water is another concern. Presently, there are over 20 m wells pumping water with free power supply, provided by the Government. This has been depleting ground water, while encouraging wastage of water in many states. As a result, the water table in the country is dipping every year by 0.4 m. In many coastal areas, there has been heavy intrusion of sea water, making fertile agricultural lands unfit for cultivation. By and large, the infrastructure development in the water sector has been extremely slow and investment has not been optimum. Furthermore, the utilisation of created water facilities has been sub-optimal because of poor catchment area development resulting in heavy soil erosion and siltation and inefficient use of water because of distribution of water in open canals, flood irrigation and charging for water on the basis of area irrigated instead of quantity of water supplied. It has been estimated that over 70% of the irrigation water is wasted by depriving irrigation to other dry areas. Farmers in India have been traditionally practicing flow irrigation which is resulting in huge wastage of water, while causing severe soil erosion, leaching of fertilisers, increasing the infestation of pests, diseases and weeds and

suppressing the crop yields. Nevertheless, farmers as well as policy makers are not serious about the discontinuation of this unscientific practice. Immediate attention is needed to shift from flood irrigation to micro irrigation and to increase the water use efficiency, which can ease the water scarcity to a great extent (Rosegrant *et al.* 2002).

With regard to the water use efficiency in agriculture, India is far below most of the developed countries as shown in Table 5. This is not only due to flood irrigation and over-watering, but also because of improper water conservation measures and crop varieties which demand more water. However, farmers are not motivated to conserve water as there is no incentive for them to do so. Global warming is posing further challenge, as the water requirement for crops will increase due to higher evapotranspiration. The rivers emerging from the Himalayas, are prone to heavy floods and subsequently face severe water shortage, thereby suppressing agricultural production.

Over 60-80 million ha of denuded forestlands and wastelands across the country are unable to retain rainwater which in turn would have ensured recharging of ground water and conservation of biodiversity. As a result, the rivers emerging from these mountains are unable to sustain the flow of water throughout the year. Heavy soil erosion has not only been causing floods but also forcing the rivers to change their courses. Such rivers will not be able to support agricultural production in the future.

Table 5
Water Use Efficiency in Agriculture

<i>Crops</i>	<i>Water foot print (Lit/kg)</i>	
	<i>India</i>	<i>World</i>
Wheat	1654	1334
Rice	2850	2291
Sugarcane	159	175
Cotton	18694	8242
Milk	1369	990
Eggs	7531	3340
Chicken	7736	3918

It is therefore necessary to address these burning issues which are affecting the water availability, although India has adequate water resources to meet the growing needs.

The National Water Policy (NWP)

India had revised the NWP in 2002 with the following salient features (Government of India, 2009):

- Establishment of National and State level data banks to monitor the demand and supply;
- Facilitation for transformation of available water resources into utilisable water;
- Non-conventional methods for efficient water use;
- Supply of water from water surplus areas to water shortage areas;
- Judicious allocation of water for different uses and pricing of water to ensure sustainable development;
- Regulation on ground water exploitation and close monitoring of water table using modern scientific techniques;
- Sustainability of existing water bodies, involving all the stakeholders and local communities;
- PPP for water resource development and distribution;
- Master plan for flood control, by linking different rivers and promoting soil conservation measures;
- Development of drought prone areas through watershed development, afforestation and sustainable farming practices;
- Interstate water sharing policy and timely addressing of disputes.

Over the last 10 years, the situation has changed drastically and the progress in the water sector has not been keeping up with the expected target. It was therefore felt necessary to bring further changes in the policy, particularly in the following areas:

Changes proposed in the National Water Policy

- **Agriculture Sector**
 - o Improvement in water usage efficiency;
 - o Adoption of rainwater harvesting and watershed management techniques;
 - o Reduction of subsidies on power supply particularly for pumping water;
 - o Prevention of ground water exploitation by introducing differential pricing, rewards and punishments;
 - o Implementation of National River Link project which aims to connect 30 rivers and canals to generate 175 trillion litres of water.
- **Industrial Sector**
 - o Encourage recycling and treatment of industrial wastewater through regulations and subsidies;

- o Encourage introduction of new technologies which consume less water.
- **Domestic Sector**
 - o Introduction of a policy for mandatory rainwater harvesting in cities;
 - o Propagation of efficient water usage;
 - o Creation of awareness about water conservation among common public.

Augmentation of Water Resources

While the consumption of water in India will increase by over 50%, the supply will increase only by 5-10% during the next 12-15 years. This will lead to water scarcity situation and most of the people, particularly those who are dependent on agriculture and living in poverty will suffer the most. Water scarcity will affect the food production, biodiversity and the environment. Environmental degradation will accelerate global warming, which in turn will accelerate water crisis. This is a vicious cycle. The only solution is to tap all the possible water resources and make them available for sustainable use, while improving the water use efficiency. This can be done by addressing various concerns and initiating suitable actions for development of new water resources, augmentation of available resources, prevention of water pollution and improving the efficiency of water use in all the sectors. For creating additional water resources, the following activities should be initiated:

Increasing Water Storage Capacity: Activities such as farm ponds, percolation tanks, water reservoirs and construction of small and medium size dams and rivers can retain more surface water, while increasing the ground water recharge. Series of contour bounds particularly in undulating areas will facilitate percolation of water in the soil and improve the ground water table, while reducing soil erosion. Gully plugging, construction of series of small dams on rivulets will help in storing water in reservoirs.

In the absence of harnessing rainwater in the forests and denuded hilly terrains, inadequate soil and water conservation measures are leading to severe soil erosion, silting of rivers beds and reservoirs and frequent flooding across the country. Presently, over 40 million ha are prone to floods in the country. Invariably, 8-10 million ha are affected by floods over year. During the year 2007-08, floods in India have caused 3689 deaths, loss of 1.14 lakh livestock and damaged 3.5 million houses, causing huge losses to the people, society and the Government. One of the major reasons for soil erosion and silting of rivers is severe deforestation. As a result of soil

erosion, many of the rivers have been changing their courses almost every year damaging fertile agricultural lands. Brahmaputra is a good example where the width of the river during summer is 3-4 km which increases to 10-12 km during the rainy season. This highlights the extent of flooding of the river and harassment to the people living along the river. Due to poor management of this river, only 22 billion m³ of water is utilisable while over 607 billion m³ water is wasted. Similar situation is prevailing with respect to other rivers such as Ganga, Godavari, Mahanadi, Narmada, etc.

Interlinking of rivers will help in preventing floods while improving water distribution in the country. Control of water flow and floods will prevent soil erosion. Presently, billions of tons of fertile soils along with precious nutrients are washed out of our fertile agricultural lands and forests. In fact, the amount of nutrients lost due to soil erosion is almost equivalent to the chemical fertilisers produced in the country. This highlights the impact of soil erosion control on the food production. Reforestation of degraded forests and development of wastelands through afforestation will help in soil and water conservation (IDSA, 2010).

Judicious distribution of water for different uses can help in preventing water scarcity. The water distribution for different purposes is influenced by powerful lobbies and vested interests. Many sectors receive more water than what is needed at the cost of others. Even within the same sector, like irrigation for agriculture, the locations for infrastructure development are often influenced by those who are politically powerful, with vested interests, while depriving others in needy regions. To overcome such inefficiency and wastage of resources, a suitable investment mechanism should be developed based on the needs and return on investments. A transparent programme implementation mechanism and regular monitoring for quality can improve the speed and quality of the projects.

Efficient Irrigation Practices: Efficiency in irrigation is most essential, if the country wants to face the challenge of water crisis. As most of the crops are watered through flood irrigation, over 70% of the water used for irrigation is wasted. Furthermore, as the water supplied is not measured, farmers have a tendency to flood the field with excessive water without any additional cost. Such a practice has been creating a negative impact by way of increased cost of leached nutrients, pollution of ground water, increase in soil salinity and increase of pests and diseases. It is high time that India compels the farmers to adopt micro-irrigation systems, which will not only reduce the water requirement but also bring down the cost of production, while increasing the area under irrigation. The Government of India should consider enforcing a ban on flood irrigation in the country. Simultaneously, metered supply of irrigation water, recovery of water cost,

promotion of micro-irrigation systems and involvement of water users' group for water distribution would significantly help in improving the water use efficiency and reducing the cost of agricultural production.

Watershed Development: Development of watersheds is an important programme to make best use of the rainwater for agricultural production while improving soil conservation and biodiversity. Fortunately, the Government of India has given top priority for watershed development to provide assured water supply of agriculture in rain fed areas. Under the watershed development programme, the catchment area of a basin is considered as a unit and efforts are made to harness rainwater by treating the land from the ridge to the valley. It is estimated that over 63% of the cultivated lands in the rain fed areas need to be brought under watershed development to conserve soil and water, which in turn would improve the crop yields as well as ground water table. Watershed development programme introduced almost about three decades ago, had covered over 51 million ha by the end of the Tenth Five Year Plan. Additional 36 million ha were being developed under the watershed development programme during the Eleventh Five Year Plan. However, a large number of watersheds are still subjected to heavy soil erosion, due to poor quality soil conservation work undertaken in the past and lack of convergence with other agricultural development activities. Therefore, there is scope for developing over 125 m ha under the watershed. Out of these areas, 85 m ha are rain fed agricultural lands and 40 m ha are wastelands. The watershed development programme is presently focussing on contour bunding and gully plugging, as the budget provided by the Government of India is just adequate to carry out these activities. Additional funds are required to support the farmers to adopt improved agricultural practices.

Control of Water Pollution: Excessive use of water for agriculture, industries and domestic uses is leading to water pollution, because such excess water is transformed into saline water, sewage or effluent. Thus, rewards and punishments should be introduced for persuading people to make optimum use of the precious water. Discharge of sewage and affluent into water bodies and rivers must be banned and recycling of waste water must be pursued and enforced. This will help in keeping the water sources clean and reducing the future demand for water. Treated sewage and effluent can be used for agriculture and industrial production.

Desalination of Sea Water: Over 70% of the global water resources being saline, economic desalination of sea water is an excellent option to meet the future shortage of sweet water particularly to meet the human consumption. Presently, desalination of sea water is expensive and non-popular. However, with solar power, desalination can be a viable alternative to meet the water needs in coastal areas.

Research and Development: There is a need for investing in research related to ground water monitoring, weather forecasting, breeding water efficient and drought resistant crops and varieties which can cope up with the changing climatic conditions, arising due to global warming.

Priority areas for Action

As the time is running out, it is necessary to act on priority in the following areas:

- The irrigation projects should be well planned and different activities such as relief and rehabilitation of project affected population, micro level land use planning and capacity building of farmers, should be initiated simultaneously;
- Afforestation on degraded forests, wastelands as well as river banks should be promoted on priority to facilitate soil conservation, recharging of ground water and preventing flooding of rivers and siltation of water reservoirs.
- Increasing irrigation efficiency from the current level of 35% to 50% in surface irrigation systems and 65% to 75% in ground water irrigation systems, can be easily achieved if careful planning and distribution of water through water meters, judicious pricing of water to recover the investment and investment in micro irrigation facilities are carried out, while improving the capabilities of the farmers. Farmers should be enlightened about the importance of water conservation and judicious uses, which are needed for achieving sustainability.
- Development of wastelands which are spread over 80 million ha and accelerating soil erosion and run off surface water, as improving the productivity of these barren lands, will help in conserving water while contributing to food production and biodiversity enrichment.
- Development of local capabilities by grooming new generation water management technicians and managers to implement various innovative projects with greater efficiency. There is also a need for promoting multidisciplinary researchers to study various aspects of water resources, conservation, efficient storage, reduction of losses and sustainable utilisation.
- Public Private Partnership, including civil society organisations and stakeholders in water resources development and conservation. So far, the State Governments were responsible for developing necessary infrastructure and managing water distribution, which

lacked people's cooperation. It is also necessary to organise small farms to enable them to get their due share of water, as the poor are excluded from most of the development projects due to their ignorance and inability to make necessary investments. Civil Society Organisations as well as Farmers' Organisations can help small farmers in adopting modern technologies and for establishing forward and backward linkage, required for increasing their income.

- Convergence of various developmental programmes can help in increasing the outputs. There are many development programmes implemented by the Ministries of Water Resources Development, Agriculture and Rural Development, which are coordinated by a single agency at the grassroot level to ensure effective utilisation of the resources while creating better impact.
- Review of the National Water Policy to enforce a ban on flood irrigation, discontinuation of free power supply to pump underground water and prevention of untreated sewage and effluent into rivers should be taken up immediately, as these practices do more harm than help the community. Realistic pricing of water based on the investment, followed by awareness and education for farmers, introducing reward and punishments for maintaining discipline in water management, would help in ensuring sustainable development.

Replication of Success Stories

Impact of Watershed Development: Several watershed development projects have demonstrated positive impacts such as enhanced soil productivity through soil and water conservation, increase in the ground water table, improvement in biodiversity and micro-climate and improved eco-system. Integration of watershed development with other related agriculture development activities such as efficient water use, organic farming and improved agriculture practices have enhanced agricultural production without depleting soil fertility and water resources. In several projects implemented by BAIF Development Research Foundation, farmers could increase their cropping intensity by 31-63% while enhancing the crop yields by 40-80%. As a result of soil conservation and percolation of rainwater, there has been a significant increase in the ground water table by 1.5 m to 4 m, within a short span of 2-3 years, which eased the problem of clean potable water supply for local villagers. Improvement in soil moisture facilitated vigorous growth of shrubs and grasses, which improved the green cover, while easing the fodder supply. With a well

planned watershed development programme and required investment both by the development agencies and the farmers, it should be possible to bring all the wastelands and degraded lands under agricultural production and enhance the income by several folds within a period of 5-6 years.

Establishment of farm ponds of 8 x 8 m or 10 x 10 m size with 2-3 m depth, is a unique concept for decentralised storage of surface run off water. Farm ponds are very effective for reducing the soil erosion and recharging of ground water. In areas where the rainfall is over 750-800 mm per year, these farm ponds fill up and over flow at least 4-5 times during the rainy season and retain water for over 4-8 months, which can be used for cultivation of high value crops as well as establishing fruit orchards.

Networking of farm ponds, 1-2 ponds per ha, has been successful in increasing the water table, thereby reviving the dried bore wells in the programmes implemented by BAIF in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. There are several locations where with efficient network of farm ponds, the rivulets which were retaining water for 4-5 months in the year are now able to retain water throughout the year. Introduction of efficient irrigation systems has significantly enhanced agricultural production. There are many micro irrigation techniques adopted by small farmers without even depending on the power supply. There are several success stories across the country where farmers and field practitioners have innovated different methods for efficient and low cost water harvesting. Such sustainable practices should be recognised and widely replicated across the country.

Tree-based Farming System: Tree-based farming has great promise in the areas covered under the watersheds as well as for developing denuded and wastelands. This is because trees demand less water and withstand water stress to a great extent. While taking up this programme, there are many options to select useful tree species particularly on private lands, based on the soil productivity, moisture availability and local needs. While shallow drylands can be covered with shrubs and grasses, deep, fertile lands can be used for growing high value fruit crops. BAIF has demonstrated the feasibility of cultivating various dryland horticultural crops instead of timber and fuelwood species where farmers are able to generate income every year without destroying the trees. This programme of agri-horti-forestry has become very successful in rehabilitation of over two lakh tribal families across the country. Under the tree-based farming programme, the critical factor which needs to be considered, is to provide livelihood to the participant families during the gestation period of 4-5 years, till the fruit trees start bearing. To address this concern, BAIF has promoted food crops in the inter space between fruit plants. Efficient use

of available water resources and effective soil water conservation could enhance the crop yields, while ensuring food security. The orchard owners are able to come out of poverty, when the fruit trees start yielding. Trees in the field and farm bunds serve as wind breaks to reduce evaporation loss and to improve the soil fertility. Agroforestry is a viable option to mitigate global warming and to face the crisis of water scarcity.

Development of Wastelands: Reclamation of sodic lands is another important programme which needs to be pursued as over 9 m ha of good fertile lands are lying idle because of high salt content. Efficient reclamation of these lands and recognition of the water use will bring this area under multiple cropping while making surplus water available to bring additional 8-10 ha under irrigation. Reclamation of sodic lands for agriculture can enhance food production by 50 million tons per year.

India also has 2 million ha of ravine lands particularly in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, where excessive soil erosion is damaging good agricultural lands, while flooding the rivers. Public Private Partnership for development of ravine lands owned by the farmers and community, can prevent soil erosion and formation of ravine lands, while helping the farmers to grow 1-2 crops every year. BAIF has demonstrated the process of soil and water conservation, resulting in increased ground water table, which could enable small farmers to drill tube wells at cost and water sharing basis to grow multiple crops.

Livestock Development: Animal Husbandry is another important sector requiring water for feeding 500 million heads of livestock and to produce fodder for them. However, as over 75% of these animals are of inferior quality, farmers let them loose in the field for free grazing. This has been causing denudation of vegetation and heavy soil erosion. BAIF has demonstrated a new approach of improving the productivity of these animals which will motivate the farmers to take up stall feeding for reducing the herd size. Such a practice will reduce the pressure on natural resources, particularly water stress, while enhancing their income. Dairy husbandry is one of the most reliable sources of livelihood for small farmers, as the families maintaining 2-3 good quality cows or buffaloes are able to come out of poverty.

There are many voluntary organisations as well as National and International research and development organisations, who have implemented several successful projects with active participation of farmers. These success stories need to be widely publicised and replicated across the country with the financial support from the on-going Government schemes. Showcasing of successful holistic water-resource management projects can motivate the water users, particularly the farmers

to adopt new practices and change their lifestyle to make efficient use of precious water.

KEY POLICY INTERVENTIONS NEEDED

- Water conservation through development of watersheds and river basins, increase in storage capacity and linking of rivers;
- Effective water use through improved irrigation systems, water efficient crops and recycling of waste water;
- Prevention of water pollution by banning the discharge of untreated sewage and effluent in river, judicious use of agro-chemicals and regulation on over-exploitation of ground water;
- Water resources management and distribution through PPP, metered water supply, pricing of water for sustainability;
- Awareness and orientation of water users for conservation of water and change in lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

Water is an integral part of Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Goal 6 focuses on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). India is not a water deficit country, but due to severe neglect and lack of monitoring of water resources development projects, several regions in the country experience water stress from time to time. Further neglect in this sector will lead to water scarcity during the next 1-2 decades. It is therefore necessary to prevent this crisis by making best use of the available technologies and resources to conserve the existing water resources, convert them into utilisable form and make efficient use of them for agriculture, industrial production and human consumption. Imposing regulatory measures to prevent the misuse of water and introducing rewards and punishment to encourage judicious use of water, will be helpful to conserve water. Finally, awareness and orientation of all the water users to change their lifestyle to conserve water, can help the country to tide over the water crisis in the future. The challenge is manageable provided we have favourable policies and mechanisms to persuade our people to change their lifestyle.

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