

## **Building water security - Groundwater conservation**

### **What is the issue?**

A key focus of water security in India has to be rational groundwater use, replenishment and conservation.

### **How is the present groundwater usage scenario?**

- Groundwater Resource Estimation Committee's report (from 2015) - 1,071 out of 6,607 blocks in the country are over-exploited.
- This is likely to have worsened over the years.
- India's groundwater usage exceeds that of China and the US combined.
- More than a third of the country's population lives in water-stressed areas, and this number is expected to shoot up.
- Per capita water availability in the country had fallen to just under a third of 1950 levels by 2011; projected to fall to a fourth in the next 20 years.

### **What are the key factors for the decline?**

- Rising population
- Increasing unsustainable use of groundwater
- Rapid rise in tubewell-irrigation
- Increase in the acreage under water-guzzling crops like sugarcane and paddy due to flawed policies like MSP-led public procurement and government fixing cane prices

Agriculture accounts for 78% of all freshwater used annually in the country; 64% of this coming from groundwater.

### **What are the present policy shortfalls?**

- The Atal Bahujal Yojana (ABY), by the Jal Shakti Ministry, is the flagship conservation programme.
- But the model proposed could take decades to get implemented across the country, but there is a need for immediate results.
- The expenditure against the targets under the scheme, as also the release of funds, has been alarmingly low for the past as well as the present year.

### **What are the favourable policies?**

#### **National Water Policy 2020**

- Contains specific strategies and deadlines

- Gives the highest priority to groundwater governance and management through a Participatory Groundwater Management (PGWM) approach

### **2018 PM-AASHA (Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan)**

- Proposes up to 40% procurement of crops that are not as water-intensive (millets, nutri-cereals) if these are successfully integrated into the PDS

## **What is to be done?**

- Stop encouraging cultivation of water-intensive crops (via MSP-led procurement, SAP/FRPs).
- Take up crop diversification
- Attention to pricing of water, and timely data on usage/availability/depletion, etc.
- Centre and the states must act rapidly on groundwater conservation if Jal Se Jeevan and other flagship water-access programmes are to be a success.

**Source: Financial Express**

