

Water Management in the 21st century

What is the issue?

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- Our ideas & institutions dealing with water management have become out-dated.

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- We are probably peddling towards disastrous wrongly perceived solutions, that calls for an immediate course correction.

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What is the background?

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- Flooding across various regions in India has become an annual phenomenon.

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- Alternately, farmers in other regions committing suicide due to lack of rains have also become common.

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- Notably, lakes catching fire, water contamination & plummeting ground-water tables are indicative of the seriousness of the crisis that we face.

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What are our systemic flaws?

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- **Outdated Ideas** - Ideas have been slow to evolve in India.

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- Whether it is management of floods or droughts, the government planning engineers haven't thought outside conventional norms.

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- The legal and constitutional mandates too are archaic and in most cases lack clarity & relevance to the 21st century.

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- The legal framework is yet to recognize the concepts of “Integrated Water Resource Management, Environment flows, Conjunctive use, Basin management, Water footprint and Virtual water trade”.

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- **Multitude of Organisations** - About 23 organisations deal with water resources at the union government level alone.

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- Similar counterparts exist at State, district and village levels with overlapping jurisdictions.

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- Paradoxically, these organisations rarely co-ordinate or integrate between themselves to solve a water problem.

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- **Expertise** - Also, most engineers in water organisations in India don't have the requisite qualifications regarding water resources.

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- Even the Central Water Engineering Services, the only dedicated water service cadre of union isn't composed of technocrats in water resources but civil servants and civil engineers.

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How can the future be best approached?

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- The 21st century faces daunting challenges that were unknown earlier.

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- Population explosion and changes in consumption patterns have raised the demand for water.

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- Climate change, silting & aging dams and the deteriorating quality of freshwater are serious issues that need focus.

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- This calls for relevant structural & policy changes along with the development of expertise that is capable of thinking out of the box.

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Source: Businessline

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