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Q16

India is well endowed with fresh water resources. Critically examine why it still suffers from water scarcity.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · GS I · 12 marks · Natural Resources and Industries

Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian sub-continent); factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India).

Core demand of the question

- Critically examine why India, though rich in fresh water on paper, still faces water scarcity
- Cover time, space, quality, use, and institutions, not only rainfall totals

Revision summary

India has large monsoon and river-groundwater resources, but rain is concentrated in a few months and regions.

Farms use most water, often for thirsty crops in dry belts, with heavy pumping.

Pollution and urban leaks cut the usable share of "fresh" water.

Per-person water has fallen, and disputes delay sharing.

Scarcity is mismanagement of a seasonal endowment, not absence of rain on the map.

Flow diagram

Monsoon snow rivers aquifers -> Large endowment

Large endowment -> Uneven season and region

Paddy cane flood irrigation -> Scarcity

Pollution leaks over-extraction -> Scarcity

Uneven season and region -> Scarcity

Governance and disputes -> Scarcity

Conclusion

- Shift cropping to rainfall, price power and water with care for the poor, treat sewage as reuse, recharge aquifers, and protect floodplains. Supply schemes without demand reform will not end scarcity.

India's fresh-water endowment is large in total and poor in timing, place, quality, and justice. Scarcity is therefore made by monsoon concentration, **groundwater mining**, farm and urban waste, and weak basin institutions. The critical answer is that nature gave volume; society failed to turn it into secure water.

Facts & figures

Southwest monsoon

Season that supplies most of India's rainfall in a short window, creating flood-then-scarcity if storage fails.

Groundwater mining

Extraction faster than recharge in several green-revolution and hard-rock districts.

Irrigation share

Agriculture takes the bulk of developed water use in India.

Per-capita water stress

Falling renewable water per person as population grows, even if national totals look large.

River disputes

Interstate conflicts that delay or limit sharing of basin water despite hydrological flow.

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