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Q5

Why is the world today confronted with a crisis of availability of and access to freshwater resources?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS I · 10 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

- Why is the world today confronted with a crisis of availability of and access to freshwater resources?
- Treat availability and access as two related crises

Revision summary

Usable freshwater is a small and uneven share of global water.

Farms, falling groundwater, climate shifts, and pollution cut availability.

Poverty, tanker markets, and transboundary politics cut access.

Virtual water in trade moves scarcity from one region to another.

SDG 6 will fail unless drinking rights, irrigation reform, and clean rivers are treated as one task.

Flow diagram

Uneven freshwater -> Overuse pollution climate

Overuse pollution climate -> Less available water

Inequality tanks conflict trade -> Unequal access

Less available water -> Water crisis

Unequal access -> Water crisis

Conclusion

- Price irrigation and urban water so waste falls, while protecting a basic drinking quota for the poor.
- Recharge aquifers, reuse treated wastewater, and share basin data across borders.
- Treat sanitation and pollution control as part of freshwater policy, not as a later add-on.

Freshwater is in crisis because nature's supply is uneven and because farms, cities, and politics waste or lock what remains. Availability and access must be fixed together through conservation, fair pricing, and clean supply.

Facts & figures

Agricultural withdrawals

About seventy percent of global freshwater withdrawals go to farming.

SDG 6

United Nations goal on clean water and sanitation for all.

Groundwater stress

Intensive well irrigation has lowered water tables in several major food plains.

Transboundary basins

Rivers such as the Nile, Mekong, and Indus create political scarcity across borders.

Virtual water

Water embedded in traded food and goods, which can export scarcity from dry regions.

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