



# Water everywhere, but not a drop to drink

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Perennial water crisis in Gujarat notwithstanding no one has ever bothered to give a serious thought as to how and why the problem is perpetual. Not only the parched state indulges in all sorts of water-intensive industries like chemical, pharmaceutical, dyeing but it also grows cash crops, requiring a lot of water. The Government, on its part, has failed to prevent excessive use of ground water resources.

The National Water Policy, formulated in 1988 after Gujarat had experienced drought for three consecutive years, clearly stipulates that the order of priority for water use should be first for drinking, followed by irrigation and the last should be for industry.

But, the various state governments, irrespective of their ideologies, have flouted the regulation. Decision to lower the price of water for industrial use from Rs 6.50 per thousand litres to Rs 3.25 at a time when more than 12,000 villages have been declared as scarcity hit, is the latest instance.

In any case, the rates for industrial use were lowest in Gujarat when compared to Rs 38 per thousand litres in neighbouring Maharashtra and Rs 65 in Karnataka. The controversy over lowering of the rates had led to the resignation of Narmada Development Minister

Apart from using up water resources, these industries also pollute water sources by dumping untreated effluents near river beds and fields. A survey by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) had identified as many as 563 large and medium water-polluting units, most of them located along what is known as the "Golden Corridor" of industries from Mehsana to Valsad. Many farmers had to seek judicial intervention after ground water had been polluted following seepage of the effluents.

On the other hand, big farmers insist on growing cash crops like groundnut, cotton and sugarcane, which need large quantities of water. No government till date has been able to stop these farmers from exploiting the ground water resources by digging their own bore wells.

To top it, these farmers sell water from their bore wells, which run on power, subsidised for the farm sector, to the Government at the time of droughts. The only regulation on these bore wells is that these can be sealed in case of refusal to supply water to the administration during droughts.

Even in the big cities like Ahmedabad, many people have retained patches of old agricultural land solely to draw water from the bore wells and sell it. Water has already become a commodity in Gujarat even though the government refuses to introduce metered supply in the urban areas, leading to wastage due to panic storage.