

# Standing Committee Report Summary

## Groundwater: A Valuable but Diminishing Resource

- The Standing Committee on Water Resources (Chair: Mr. Parbatbhai Savabhai Patel) presented its report on ‘Groundwater: A Valuable but Diminishing Resource’ on March 17, 2023. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
  - **Creation of a central body:** Multiple bodies at both state and central levels currently bear responsibility for issues related to water. These include (i) central ministries such as the ministries of Jal Shakti, rural development, and agriculture and farmers’ welfare; (ii) state departments, (iii) state and central pollution control boards; and (iv) dedicated authorities such as the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) and the Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA). The Committee observed a lack of coordination between them, and recommended that the Ministry of Jal Shakti constitute a central body with representation from those mentioned above.
  - **Legislation:** Laws on groundwater management have been passed in 19 states based on a model Bill circulated in 1970 and last revised in 2005. The Committee observed difficulties in implementing these laws due to the lack of guidelines. They recommended that the Department of Water Resources, River Development, and Ganga Rejuvenation takes urgent action in this regard.
  - **Irrigation:** The Committee observed excessive dependence on groundwater for irrigation because water-intensive crops, such as paddy and sugarcane, command higher minimum support price (MSP). Schemes providing farmers with financial assistance and free or subsidised electricity for irrigation have contributed to this issue. The Committee recommended that the Department of Water Resources, River Development, and Ganga Rejuvenation engage with the Department of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare to encourage less water-intensive cultivation crops and cultivation patterns.
  - **Groundwater pollution:** The Committee observed widespread groundwater contamination resulting from industrial activity. They recommended that more funds under Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), which aims to provide households with safe drinking water, can be allocated to areas with groundwater contamination. The Committee also observed a lack of sharing of data and coordination between bodies responsible for addressing groundwater pollution such as state government departments, pollution control boards, and agencies such as the CGWA. They recommended that the proposed central groundwater authority should coordinate between them, and formulate a policy on groundwater pollution. The Committee observed that personnel and resource shortages hinder state and central pollution control boards, and recommended that these are addressed. The Committee also recommended amendment of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, to enable pollution control boards to impose monetary penalties, as a less severe penalty than the outright closure of industrial units.
- **Groundwater recharging:** Schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana implement projects for artificial recharge of groundwater. This refers to the construction of structures designed to recharge groundwater. The Committee recommended modification of these schemes to also support the rejuvenation of existing water bodies. There are schemes for recharging groundwater through rainwater harvesting in urban areas, such as Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT). The Committee recommended that the Ministry of Jal Shakti coordinate these efforts. Urban local bodies should be given more funds to maintain water bodies. The Atal Bhujal Yojana provides central financial assistance to state governments and local bodies (such as gram panchayats) for projects related to groundwater management. Since it is currently only being piloted in seven states, the Committee recommended its extension to all states facing groundwater scarcity.
- **Climate change:** The National Water Mission is one of the Missions implementing the National Action Plan on Climate Change, along with the National Solar Mission and others. It is responsible for formulating strategies on the conservation, efficient management, and equitable distribution of water resources, and coordinating between central government departments for this purpose. The Committee observed that it is hindered by lack of funds and autonomy, and recommended that it is strengthened in this regard.

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