



General Studies-1; Topic: Role of women and women's organization

Role of Women in Water Management

Introduction

- A study conducted on water supply projects in Gujarat in 2000 showed that when women were included in technical and decision-making capacities, there was a marked improvement in the impact of projects.
- Women have been creating consistent ripples in India's water security efforts — the time is right to leverage them as leaders of change.

Water scarcity

- Water scarcity has been consistently considered as one of the top five risks by business leaders in the annual global risk report of the World Economic Forum.
- According to the United Nations, over two billion people live in countries experiencing high water stress.
- India alone has 88 million people who lack access to safe water, placing the nation at the centre of this global problem.
- Eighty per cent of India's freshwater is used in agriculture, making it a critical resource for the livelihoods of farmers and the country's food security.
- Farmers rely heavily on groundwater through wells and tube-wells.

Role of Women in Water Management

- The water problem runs deep, and to address it, it is crucial to identify and mobilise the right agents for change.
- Women constitute 37% of the agricultural workforce.

- Several studies have revealed that women spend twice the number of hours that men do, working on fields in the cropping season - this need them to plan for and use water judiciously.
- Women engage with the issue of water in different avatars — as farmers, panchayat members, MGNREGS workers and extension workers.
- This makes them well-suited to leading water management programmes.
- They have also demonstrated their ability to mobilise funds from the government.
- In a project in West Bengal, women influenced the government to release MGNREGS funds to construct water supply structures that created an additional water potential of 7.4 billion litres and benefitted 35,000 women.
- Unicef’s work in India has also proved women’s prowess at mechanical work.
- In Jharkhand’s Lava panchayat, women formed a diverse group from across every panchayat to maintain 450 pumps.
- Women were more efficient and were able to resolve issues more quickly than their male counterparts.
- Women have also shown an eagerness to adopt new technologies, explore sustainable farming methods and spread awareness among their families, making them excellent potential water champions.
- Women-led collectives have driven changes in cropping practices, and demonstrated a bigger willingness to switch to organic inputs and grow climate-resilient crops that consume less water.

Way Forward

- The crisis created by large-scale groundwater extraction needs concerted and scaled-up water management efforts in rural India.
- Considering their high stakes in ensuring water security, women are well poised to champion change.
- The time is right to leverage women as leaders of change.