

South Asia - Coping up with water scarcity



The South Asian countries, Afghanistan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; India; Iran; Maldives; Nepal; Pakistan and Sri Lanka are home to about one-fourth of the world's population, but only contain about 4.5 per cent (1,945 billion m³) of the world's annual renewable water resources (43,659 billion m³). And except for Bhutan and Nepal, per capita water availability in the region is recorded less than the world average, with water use in this region being limited mainly to agriculture sector.

Over the years the since 1950, average water availability per capita across the region has decreased by 70% and this will continues to decline. The expected population growth, estimated to increase by 800 million by 2050 (UN); will intensify practices and irrigation; increasing energy demand from greater industrial activity and economic growth; urbanization and rising incomes; and deteriorating water quality in the regions' surface and groundwater resources. Climate change places a further, unprecedented threat on these water resources. The region already faces extreme climate-induced disasters, such as annual floods, cyclones, and droughts. Coastal flooding and sea-level rises also threaten some of the region's "megacities," such as Dhaka, Mumbai, and Karachi.

Home to the glacier-laced Hindu Kush-Himalayas, the region is perceived to be one with plenty of water and is the source of 10 major river systems in Asia, yet, there are major imbalances in precipitation across the region, and – averaged out – the region is relatively dry. The major rivers in contiguous South Asia – the Indus and Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basins – run through two or more countries, making the sharing of increasingly scarce, transboundary water resources one of the most contentious issues in the region. The main drivers for conflicts over water can be said to relate to the riparian structure and the relationships between riparians and the diverging interests between up- and downstream, the

sovereignty notions, the water scarcity, the water quality and the regional power hierarchy. And treaties such as “Indus River Treaty”, signed in 1960, divides the Indus River Basin along the India/Pakistan border and gives control of the rivers to the east to India and those in the west to Pakistan and allows the countries to share water from the Indus River.

Water scarcity affects all social and economic sectors and threatens the sustainability of the natural resources base. Therefore addressing water scarcity requires an inter sectorial and multidisciplinary approach to managing water resources in order to maximize economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.

In recognizing the need of a holistic approach in tackling the global water problems, in September 2015, the UN General Assembly agreed on a stand-alone water goal (number 6), to “Ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.”

This achievement reflects the fact that “ water and sanitation is a key priority for countries across regions worldwide“

Goal 06 on Clean Water and Sanitation & its Targets



6.1 By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all

6.2 By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations

6.3 By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally

6.4 By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity

6.5 By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate

6.6 By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes

6.a By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies

6.b Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management

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