

Telangana today - 17 March -2024

# Dry and distressed: Karnataka's wait for water

**As the state faces an intensifying water crisis, how will Karnataka carve a path towards source sustainability and groundwater replenishment?**

## INSIGHT

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**D**espite being the main catchment area of River Cauvery, Kodagu is not unfamiliar with water shortage during summer months. This year, the district administration's move to restrict irrigation to ensure the availability of drinking water has triggered a water war. "Farmers in Kodagu use stream water for irrigation only for two months in a year, how can the district administration ban it?" asked farmer leader Manu Somaiah on Friday, during a protest in front of the deputy commissioner's office.

"Such a step will kill our crops while resorts are allowed to waste water throughout the year," says Somaiah.

The water crisis hit headlines over the last two weeks after Bengaluru finally woke up to dry borewells and a shortage of tankers, nearly six months after Karnataka declared 223 taluks as drought-hit. Meanwhile, farmers, frustrated with the water crisis, raised an outcry when the price of chillies they had struggled to grow in the burning heat, crashed overnight last week.

While the state stands in wait of monsoon, which is more than two months away, water levels at Karnataka's 23 reservoirs are at 131 tmcft on March 15. This is 56 tmcft less than the previous year. A crisis seems to be looming. Live storage at the Krishnaraja Sagar has dipped to 6.34 tmcft, similar to water levels during the drought of 2016-17, raising questions

about what has been done in the past eight years to avoid a repeat crisis.

### Government initiatives

Several government schemes have been implemented to ensure tap water supply to rural areas in the event of such crises. In fact, a senior official in the rural water supply department says the problem has been mitigated due to these central and state schemes. "The data on the water supply schemes will show that we have made significant steps towards providing safe drinking water," he says.

As per the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti,

75% of 1.01 crore households in Karnataka have been provided with tap connections. The assets have been geotagged to monitor the progress of the scheme. However, there is no direct answer as to how many of them actually carry water.

Data shows that Karnataka has 40,300 piped water supply projects in 31 districts. Though work orders have been issued for 38,231 works, only 3,315 (8.67%) have been "physically completed" while thousands of projects are at various stages of completion.

The delay has led to a struggle for survival, especially for those on the margins of rural communities. For instance, residents in the Asthana tribal *haadi* (tribal hamlet) in Virajpet taluk of Kodagu district are facing a drinking water crisis. The residents of the *haadi* are forced to collect water from sources that are far away.

A permanent solution is still a distant dream for residents. "Some have to walk more than half a kilometre to fetch a pot of water from a public well," a resident told DH.

► **Water crisis, Page 3A**



**People collect water from a tanker in Amargol, Hubballi.**

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