

PANEL URGES PLAN TO SAVE SPRINGS

Relevant for: World & Indian Geography | Topic: Landforms by Running Water, changes therein and in Flora & Fauna and the Effects of such changes

A file photo of a spring near Shimla.

A NITI Aayog constituted group of experts has urged the government to set up a dedicated mission to salvage and revive spring water systems in the country's Himalayan States given their vital importance as a source of water for both drinking and irrigation for the region's inhabitants.

Spanning States across the country's north and northeast and home to about 50 million people, the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) has been heavily reliant on these natural groundwater sources, that are under increasing threat from the urbanisation caused by a constant push for development and climate change.

"Almost half of the perennial springs have already dried up or have become seasonal and tens of thousands of villages are currently facing acute water shortage for drinking and other domestic purposes," the group noted in its report titled 'Inventory and Revival of Springs in the Himalayas for Water Security.' "Almost 60% of low-discharge springs that provided water to small habitations in the Himalayan region have reported clear decline during the last couple of decades," the report's authors, who included experts from the Department of Science and Technology, noted.

Shimla crisis

The extent of the crisis plaguing the mountainous region was recently evident when more than half a dozen districts of Himachal Pradesh and the State capital Shimla faced a severe drinking water crisis this May after major water sources either went fully or partially dry. While poor water management was said to be the key cause, according to State authorities, they also attributed reduced snowmelt and depressed flow from springs as contributors to the crisis.

While Meghalaya with 3,810 villages with springs had the highest number of these water sources in the Eastern Himalayan States, Sikkim had the greatest density with 94% of its villages having a spring. In the Western Himalayas, Jammu & Kashmir had both the highest number of villages with springs at 3,313 and the greatest density of 50.6%.

The task force moots an 8-year programme to overhaul spring water management. This includes: preparing a digital atlas of the country's springsheds, training 'para-hydrogeologists' who could lead grassroots conservation and introduction of a 'Spring Health Card.'

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