

1. Jal Jeevan Mission will Empower Women, Reduce their Drudgery

Context:

- For centuries, in most parts of the country, especially in rural areas, our women have borne the responsibility of ensuring the water security of their homes. In some instances, this would involve walking long distances in unfriendly weather and Treacherous Terrain.

Background:

- **For a country with 16 per cent of the world's population, and only 4 per cent of the world's Freshwater Resources**, with the changing weather patterns and frequent droughts, over 250 of the 700 districts of India's districts are now water stressed.
- **Two Hundred and Fifty Six** of our approximately 700 districts have groundwater levels **which are "critical" or "over-exploited"** as per the latest data from the Central Ground Water Board (2017).
- According to a report by the National Commission for Women, on an average, a rural woman in Rajasthan walks over 2.5 km to reach a water source. The bottom-line is that our women and girls spend a significant proportion of their time on fetching water.

Swachh Bharat Mission:

- In 2014, India saw an incredible shift in the national development agenda. This shift in policy focus was to reduce the drudgery faced specially by women and girls, and improve their quality of life by providing them services targeted for their convenience.
- The first major step in this direction was to end the practice of open defecation – and restore the dignity of our women of their dignity and basic health. Over the next five years, the Swachh Bharat revolution has transformed lives across the country by ensuring access to safe sanitation for over 10 crore households.
- This resulted in fewer women with lower than normal body mass index in open defecation free (ODF) villages in India as compared to other villages where people defecated in the open. Studies also found that the increased in-home toilet access in India has **significantly reduced sexual assaults on Women.**

Other Programs to Reduce the Drudgery for Women:

- **The Ujjwala scheme provided LPG Cylinders to crores of rural women**, saving them from the toxic fumes that they breathed on a daily basis when they burnt firewood for their chulhas.

- The POSHAN abhiyan supports the health of children, adolescent girls and women, to reduce cases of low birth weight, stunting, under-nutrition, and anaemia.
- The Swachh Bharat Mission has created a cadre of head women masons, better known as “Rani Mistris”, who have breached a traditional male bastion and have already constructed lakhs of toilets across the country.

Jal Jeevan Mission:

- The Mission aims at providing **Har Ghar Jal or piped water supply to all Households by 2024**. While 57 per cent of the country is covered with public stand posts for their daily water supply, the JJM will connect individual households to appropriate and adequate water supply. Currently, **only 18 per cent of rural households have this Amenity**.
- Jal Jeevan Mission operational guidelines, listed out the government’s step-by-step approach to tackle this problem.
- The New **Ministry of Jal Shakti** breaks the silos in which the water sector had been working in, **allowing for Institutional Integration** from the centre till the grass roots.
- **Schemes are Being Designed with Local Flexibility** to allow for effective adaptivity to local situations.
- **Source sustainability is being mandatorily built Into Schemes** to ensure that every drop of water is recycled and reused.
- **Efforts must take form of a Jan Andolan for water** to ensure the overall water security of our great nation.
- Another scheme to conserve groundwater in regions with low water tables, the **Atal Jal Yojana**, was also recently launched. It is based on community participation, a key component of this programme **is the formation of water use associations, in which at least 50 per cent of Members are to be Women**.

Conclusion:

- With women playing a leadership role in managing their community’s water resources, minus the drudgery of walking for miles to fetch water for their families, the Jal Jeevan Mission will provide a massive fillip to the ease of living for women, and they will no longer be beasts of burden.
- For real change, it is optimal that we ensure that the real heads of the households — our mothers and sisters — continue to be at the centre of our country’s Development Agenda.