ECOLOGIC

A Few DIY Steps to Make Every Drop Count

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From canceled IPL matches to farmer suicides, droughts have wreaked havoc across the country this year. Living with 'metro water lorries' and streets lined with plastic buckets, urban Indians have all faced some form of water drought. Indra Nooyi, chairperson, Pepsico, USA, is reported to have said that learning to get ready for school in Chennai with one bucket of water has taught her unforgettable lessons of frugality.

The UN projects India's urban population to rise to 50% of its total population by 2050. This would mean 840 million people would live in the most water-starved parts of the country, compared with 320 million today. Urban homes are planned for 5 persons each with a per capita consumption of 135 liters per day. The rural standard of consumption is one third, only at 45 liters per person, per day. Irrigation dominates water consumption, and 55% of consumption uses groundwater, the rampant exploitation of which has depleted its availability and quality. Nearly 30% of urban water supply and 70% of rural water supply comes from groundwater. The gloomy forecast for groundwater stock by 2050 means that we may be forced to import drinking water. All of which point to poor awareness among people, reduced green cover and inadequate rainwater harvesting through ponds, lakes and wells.

Metro tankers are a common sight in water starved Chennai • Express

Water-use recycle and reduction equals water-conservation. It is the easiest of methods to employ when trying to alleviate the overall water crisis around us. Master planners include sewage treatment plants to convert sewage water into water that is recycled for flushing toilets. Singapore imports water from Malaysia today, and their water security plans includes tertiary treatment of sewage into recyclable water fit for human consumption!

Water-saving showerheads and low-flow faucet aerators are fixtures that are easy to retrofit. This makes saving water at home an inexpensive renovation project! Water-saving low-flow showerheads or restrictors are also easy to install and readily available. 'Low-flow' means it uses less than 9.5 litres per minute. Also, all household faucets should be fit with aerators. These are available at 5.6-9.4 litres per minute and work well for bathroom sinks and most water outlets, delivering the same spray force in a comfortable, soft stream.

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As much as 75% of water at homes is used in bathrooms, and 25% of this is for the water closet. Modern WC's come with an ULF (ultra-low flush) or dual flush feature and use only 4 or 6 litres per flush. Installing a simple tank bank or float booster is a cheap way to retrofit an existing WC to make it low flush.

To convert a conventional 15 litres per flush to a 3-litre per flush, put an inch or two of sand or pebbles inside each of two plastic bottles to weigh them down. Fill the bottles with water, screw the lids on, and put them in your toilet tank, safely away from the operating mechanisms.

Water is precious and a depleting commodity. Remember to reduce your consumption and contribute to India's future water security.

(The writer is an architect, urban designer, dancer and chief designer at Shilpa Architects)