

April 09 2012 | Last updated 9 minutes ago

gulfnews.com

UAE | Government

GCC needs integrated water policy

loading
Close [x]

Despite scarcity of resources and lack of arable land, there is still a number of options

By Samir Salama, Associate Editor

Published: 00:00 March 27, 2012



Image Credit: Abdel-Krim Kallouche/Gulf News

From left: Dr Hussain A. Amery, Prof Seetharam K. Easwaran, Dr Mohammad Al Mulla and Prof Peter P. Rogers at the Emirates Centre for Strategic Research and Studies' 17th annual conference on Water and Food Security in Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi: The GCC nations face extreme water scarcity with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE at the

highest risk, warned experts at a regional water security conference.

"Water and food security are major issues affecting development in the UAE and the Gulf region as climatic conditions are similar across the region, which is arid and has limited renewable water resources," Dr Rashid Ahmad Bin Fahd, minister of environment and water, said in his keynote speech, which was read out by Dr Mariam Hassan Al Shenasi, undersecretary of the ministry.

Dr Bin Fahd sought to impress on the Emirates Centre for Strategic Research and Studies' 17th annual conference on Water and Food Security yesterday that the region's water demand had increased from 6 billion cubic metres in 1980 to 26 billion cubic metres in 1995, while the annual per capita share of water had decreased from 700 cubic metres in 1970 to 170 cubic metres in 2000.

"The ground-water shortage has led to growing demand for fresh water. Around 70 per cent of available fresh water is used by the agriculture sector, while water demand in the urban sector has more than doubled. Moreover, domestic water consumption is not economical. All these factors complicate the problem," Dr Bin Fahd said.

Article continues below



Recognising the adverse impact of excessive water consumption, the UAE has taken a number of measures to maintain its water and food security as part of a comprehensive strategy backed by established legal frameworks and launched a far-reaching review of water and agricultural policies.

Recycling efforts

Infographic



With increasing demand for desalinated water, which currently meets 40 per cent of all water needs

Related Links

Water policies can help improve life
GCC faces challenges of rising population

With increasing demand for desalinated water, which currently meets 40 per cent of all water needs, desalination capacity has been expanded. The usage of treated wastewater has also increased but consumption remains excessive in the urban sector.

Dr Bin Fahd argued that pressure on water and food supplies in the GCC calls for a comprehensive water and food strategy. "Despite the scarcity of water resources and the shortage of arable land, there are a number of capabilities and options in this regard."

Desalination cost

The UAE spends nearly Dh12 billion per year on water desalination to meet its fast-growing needs of drinking water and offset dwindling reserves.

The investments cover nearly 70 sea water desalination plants, accounting for around 14 per cent of the world's total output of desalinated water, she said.

Professor Seetharam K. Easwaran, director of Institute of Water Policy, Lee Kuan Uew School of Public Policy, said water is the lifeline of the planet, just like oil is crucial for economic growth.

"Water is not only essential for sustaining human life, but also important in ensuring public health, food and energy production and hence prosperity of our society.

The first 2 litres of safe drinking water per day were just like food or medicine, while the next 20-30 litres per day are needed in each house to ensure good health, and the remaining 70-80 litres of water needed by each household was like a commodity that is necessary to support economic activities, the expert explained.

"State-run water utilities in India that aim to distribute 100 or more litres per capita per day lose up to 70 per cent of the water they produce through leakage and theft. While the water they produce in their treatment plants is reportedly potable, unfortunately, due to intermittent supply, the water that reaches the taps in most cities is not," he said explaining the challenges facing utility companies.

Development link

The undeniable linkages between water and sanitation and the other 17 targets in the millennium development

goals had been highlighted in the Asia Water Watch 2015, Prof Easwaran said. "The analysis reaffirmed the centrality of water for human development," he added.

Putting the average daily personal water consumption in the GCC countries at 350 litres, Dr Abdul Latif Al Zayani, GCC secretary-general, said the Gulf region still lacks a real integrated water management policy to ensure water security.

On how to tackle water insecurity, Dr Hussain A. Amery, Colorado School of Mines, said desalination was the best available option to protect autonomy of Gulf states since importing water from Iran or Turkey would leave them vulnerable to supply disruptions.