

# Clean water still a dream for 4.6 crore

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CHENNAI: [Clean drinking water](#) is out of reach for 4.64 crore people in rural areas in the country, says a report tabled by the Union water resources ministry in Parliament last week.

In Rajasthan, 25,500 habitations or 1.09 crore people get water with chemical or bacterial contamination. Assam comes next with 12,879 rural habitations without safe drinking water, followed by Bihar with 10,587 households.

Two lakh people in 486 habitations in Tamil Nadu are exposed to contaminated water. While both Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu are water-deficient states, TN has a better track record in managing the situation with schemes such as [rainwater harvesting](#) and desalination plants. The Hogenakkal drinking water scheme is the latest to be commissioned for the fluoride-hit districts of Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri. Children and adults are affected by the high presence of fluoride in groundwater in these districts.

"Groundwater in rural areas of Vaniyambadi and Ambur in Vellore district in the north of the state has been polluted by effluents from tanneries. Water is contaminated with chromium, sodium chloride and other chemicals," said S Ravichandran, professor, water resources division, Anna University. Vellore collector P Sankar said farmers in the district affected by contamination of water have been compensated from funds collected from the tanneries. "We are unable to find some of the farmers and have pasted notices in villages asking them to appear in person," said Sankar. In rural parts of Tirupur district, water is contaminated by chemicals released from dyeing units. River systems like the [Cauvery](#), [Bhavani](#) and Noyyal have also been affected by toxic effluents released from the units.

Smaller states and Union territories seem to fare better with almost the entire rural population getting clean water. Contaminated water resulting in the spread of water-borne diseases like cholera and dysentery is said to be the main cause for the rising child mortality rate in the country. Across India, there are 84,292 rural habitations, which only have access to water contaminated by chemicals, said the statement made in the Lok Sabha by Union water resource minister Harish Rawat.

Sunita Narain of Centre for Science and Environment told TOI, "The situation is worrying and action needs to be taken to provide clean drinking water to all rural habitations." She said the projects under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme should not go in vain. It is the world's biggest ecological regeneration effort with at least a million water bodies being dug, desilted or renovated by people. "We must make sure these water bodies are not just holes in the ground, but will capture the next rain and recharge the aquifers," she said.