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Special initiative needed for safe drinking water: Kalam

Special Correspondent

Former President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam has called for a special initiative to provide safe drinking water for all.

Speaking at the two-day international conference on 'Water partnerships towards meeting the climate challenge,' organised by the Centre of Excellence for Change, in association with UNICEF and Government of Tamil Nadu, here on Wednesday, he lamented that 3.5 million deaths were reported across the globe in a year due to unclean drinking water. "As many as seven persons are killed by this every minute."

In India alone, 1600 persons died of diarrhoea every year. He pleaded that provision for safe drinking water be undertaken as a "societal mission." He wanted linking of all rivers to tide over water shortage.

He hailed the Siruthuli experiment undertaken in Coimbatore for "recovering the lost water bodies. He wanted each user of the waterbody to become a stakeholder in its maintenance.

For these things to happen, he pleaded for "attitudinal change" and "partnerships" of various kinds. He was happy to note that the multi-government departmental partnership with Tamil Nadu Agricultural University forged in a project of the Tamil Nadu Government had proved extremely successful in terms of improving water sources and productivity.

He congratulated the Gujarat Government for its consistent agricultural growth rate of nine per cent, thrice the national average, saying that the main reason was the farm-level water conservation and maintenance and large-scale community participation in the maintenance of 3,50,000 minor water bodies.

Adverting to climate change, Mr. Kalam pleaded for evolution of Chennai and also making Tamil Nadu carbon-neutral by 2030.

Rajender Singh Tarun Bharat Singh, Ramon Magsaysay awardee, advocated revival of systems using indigenous knowledge. Even during ancient times, India had separate systems for drinking water and waste water. Most of the problems could not be solved by investment-based planning, he asserted.

Mr. Singh, who dwelt on "community driven decentralised management," said it was important to understand that community action could have better impact in water management.

He lamented that India did not know "how much water is available — surface level, subsurface level and underground." The strategy was dominated by exploiting water resources without any connection to nature.

"There should be a code of conduct of what to give and what to take from Nature." Seven rivers in Rajasthan could be rejuvenated because of community's involvement. "While planning, the geo-cultural diversity should be respected."

Mr. Rajinder Singh appealed to the engineering fraternity to give up its "arrogance of knowledge," which separated them from the common villagers, and thus ensure "community governance."

Keywords: [drinking water issue](#), [clean water initiative](#)