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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# Living With an Erratic Monsoon

 **DOWN TO EARTH**28 June 2026 · **ENVIRONMENT** · **GS3**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# Living With an Erratic Monsoon

Down to Earth 28 June 2026 **GS3**

Source: [ujyari.com](http://ujyari.com) — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"India still treats a bad monsoon as an emergency to be relieved. If erratic rain is now the norm, is reactive drought relief a failure of imagination rather than a sign of compassion?"*

Source: [Original editorial](#) [Down to Earth](#)

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources (<https://ujyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

The **southwest monsoon** advanced late and unevenly in **June 2026**, with nearly 75 per cent of India's land area facing a rainfall deficiency above 20 per cent and an overall June deficit near 40 per cent. For an aspirant, this is a GS3 case on **climate variability, water management, agriculture and the shift from relief to adaptation**.

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

A delayed, uneven monsoon delays kharif sowing, weakens groundwater recharge and lowers reservoir storage. The deeper truth is that this **variability is now structural**, driven by a warming climate, not a passing anomaly. India's reflex, **reactive drought relief**, treats the symptom. The answer is systemic **adaptation**: forecasting, water harvesting, climate-resilient crops and well-designed crop insurance.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

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CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
<b>Monsoon variability</b>	Erratic timing, spread and intensity of rain	Structural under climate change, not episodic
<b>Reactive relief</b>	Aid after a deficit hits	Treats symptoms; misses the cause
<b>Adaptation</b>	Building systems that absorb variability	Forecasting, storage, resilient crops
<b>Watershed / recharge</b>	Capturing and storing rainwater	Buffers against dry spells

## THE ANALYSIS

- 1 A monsoon-dependent economy.** The southwest monsoon supplies the bulk of annual rainfall, waters kharif crops, recharges aquifers and fills reservoirs. A weak onset ripples into sowing, groundwater, hydropower and prices.
- 2 Variability is now structural.** June 2026's roughly 40 per cent deficit and uneven spread, with weak cross-equatorial winds, reflect a warming climate that makes the monsoon more erratic, not a one-off bad year.
- 3 Relief treats the symptom.** Drought relief, waivers and emergency releases arrive after the harvest is already at risk. They are necessary stop-gaps but not a strategy.
- 4 Adaptation treats the cause.** Hyperlocal forecasting, watershed and recharge works, short-duration resilient crops and millets, and robust crop insurance reduce exposure before the rains fail.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

June 2026 overall rainfall deficit near **40 per cent**; about **75 per cent** of land area with above-20-per-cent deficiency; weak cross-equatorial winds stalled the advance. **The bodies:** IMD (forecasting); **Ministry of Jal Shakti; Atal Bhujal Yojana** (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/atal-bhujal-yojana/>) (groundwater); **PMKSY** (Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana) and watershed development. **The schemes:** **PMFBY** (Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (<https://ujjiyari.com/schemes/pmfbby/>), crop insurance); **NMSA / National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture**; millet promotion / Shree Anna. **Concept:** kharif vs rabi; rainfed agriculture (about half of net sown area); **aquifer** (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/aquifer/>) recharge; climate-resilient agriculture.

## THE DEBATE

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**Argument for adaptation:** Variability is structural, so only systemic measures, forecasting, water harvesting, resilient crops and insurance, can protect incomes and water security. Reactive relief is costly, recurring and never gets ahead of the problem.

**Argument for caution:** Adaptation is expensive and slow, political incentives reward visible relief over invisible resilience (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/resilience/>), and small and marginal farmers lack the capital and credit to adopt new seeds, practices and technology on their own.

**Balanced verdict:** Relief will always be needed as a safety net, but it cannot be the strategy. The structural answer is to shift budgets and incentives toward adaptation, while financing small farmers' transition, so resilience is built before the rains fail, not relief paid after.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

*Policy for a one-off shock (relief) differs fundamentally from policy for a structural trend (adaptation). Misclassifying a trend as a shock produces endless firefighting. Strong answers first establish that monsoon variability is now a trend, then derive the systemic response that follows.*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Warming climate -> erratic monsoon (late, uneven, ~40% June deficit) -> delayed sowing + low recharge + low reservoirs -> IF reactive relief only -> recurring crisis || IF forecasting + water harvesting + resilient crops + insurance -> resilience to variability

## THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Fund hyperlocal forecasting.** Strengthen IMD's localised, longer-range forecasts so farmers and water managers can plan sowing and storage.
- ② **Scale water harvesting and recharge.** Expand watershed development and aquifer recharge under Jal Shakti to bank surplus rain.
- ③ **Mainstream resilient crops.** Promote short-duration varieties and millets to cut exposure to a late or failed onset.
- ④ **Fix crop insurance and shift budgets.** Improve PMFBY design and move spending from drought relief toward adaptation infrastructure, financing small farmers' transition.

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

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*Monsoon variability is now structural; policy must shift from reactive relief to systemic adaptation in water and agriculture.*

*“Living with variability means designing for it.”*

*June 2026 ~40% rainfall deficit; cross-equatorial winds; PMFBY; Atal Bhujal Yojana; PMKSY; NMSA; Shree Anna / millets; rainfed agriculture share.*

*Is recurring drought relief a sign of compassion or a failure of foresight, and who should bear the cost of a farmer’s climate transition?*

*UPSC has asked on the monsoon, rainfed agriculture, water management and climate adaptation; this connects them to a live deficit year.*

*Climate adaptation, food security, groundwater depletion, agrarian distress.*

**Sources:** *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in>), *India Meteorological Department* (<https://mausam.imd.gov.in>), *ThePrint* (<https://theprint.in>)

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**KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

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**A delayed and uneven southwest monsoon underscores that climate variability is now structural, demanding investment in forecasting, water harvesting, climate-resilient crops and crop insurance rather than reactive relief.**

 **SUPPORTING**

- Better localised, longer-range forecasting lets farmers and water managers plan sowing, storage and releases instead of reacting to deficits after the fact.
- Water harvesting and aquifer recharge buffer rainfall variability by storing surplus and supporting irrigation and drinking water through dry spells.
- Climate-resilient, short-duration crops and robust crop insurance protect farm incomes when the rains arrive late or fail.

 **COUNTER**

Critics argue adaptation is costly and slow, that political incentives favour visible relief over invisible resilience, and that small and marginal farmers lack the capital and credit to adopt new practices and technologies.

 **WAY FORWARD**

Fund hyperlocal forecasting, scale watershed and groundwater recharge, mainstream climate-resilient crops and millets, fix crop insurance design, and shift budgets from drought relief to adaptation infrastructure.


**MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

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**QUESTION**

*"Climate variability has made the monsoon structurally unreliable, requiring a shift from reactive relief to systemic adaptation." Examine with reference to water management and agriculture in India. (250 words)*

**INTRODUCTION**

Every year India is surprised by a monsoon that should no longer surprise anyone. A delayed, uneven 2026 monsoon is not an anomaly to be relieved but the new normal to be planned for.

The question is whether policy will adapt as fast as the climate has.

**BODY**

The southwest monsoon delivers the bulk of India's annual rainfall and waters its kharif crops, recharges its aquifers and fills its reservoirs. In June 2026 it advanced late and unevenly: nearly three-quarters of India's land faced a rainfall deficiency above 20 per cent, and the overall June deficit approached 40 per cent, with weak cross-equatorial winds stalling the advance.

The consequences ripple outward, delayed sowing of rice, pulses, cotton and oilseeds, weaker groundwater recharge, lower reservoir storage and reduced hydropower. The deeper point is that such variability is no longer episodic but structural; a warming climate makes the monsoon more erratic in timing, distribution and intensity.

India's standard response, drought relief, fee waivers and emergency releases, treats the symptom after the harvest is already at risk. Adaptation treats the cause.

Hyperlocal, longer-range forecasting lets farmers and water managers plan sowing and storage. Watershed development and aquifer recharge bank surplus rain against dry spells.

Short-duration, climate-resilient varieties and millets cut exposure to a late onset. Well- designed crop insurance stabilises incomes when rains fail.

The obstacle is political and fiscal: resilience is invisible and slow, relief is visible and immediate, and small farmers lack the capital to adapt alone. Shifting budgets and incentives from relief to adaptation is the structural reform a structural problem demands.

**CONCLUSION**

An erratic monsoon is now a permanent feature, not a passing crisis. The measure of policy is whether it builds resilience before the rains fail rather than relief after.

Living with variability means designing for it.


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