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Apna Jal: The Water India Already Has and Refuses to Use

 THE HINDU

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ENVIRONMENT

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 The Hindu

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The framework calls treated wastewater Apna Jal, our water. If the barrier to reuse is psychological as much as infrastructural, what should a district administrator actually do differently?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)

The Hindu

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Water questions in GS3 and GS1 are usually answered from the supply side: interlinking, rainwater harvesting, watershed management, groundwater regulation. Candidates recite the same four instruments every year.

This piece supplies the fifth instrument, the one that is already built. India has spent a decade constructing sewage treatment capacity under AMRUT and Namami Gange; the gap is no longer treatment, it is **offtake**. Learning to frame reuse as a **loop-closure problem**, with institutional, economic and psychological layers, gives you an answer architecture that most scripts will not have, and it works equally for a question on urban water, on [circular economy](#), or on cooperative federalism in water governance, since the 2022 framework deliberately pushes policy down to the states.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The trigger. Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand recently notified **treated wastewater reuse policies**, developed through extensive consultation. The authors hold them up as models of **contextualised policymaking**: they distinguish hill communities from densely populated plains, and embed **fit-for-purpose reuse**, integration with **urban planning and river rejuvenation**, **community participation**, **blended finance** and **public-private partnership** pathways, and **digital monitoring**.

The national frame. The **National Framework on Safe Reuse of Treated Water (SRTW), 2022** was developed by the **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)** under the **Ministry of Jal Shakti**, with support from the **India-EU water partnership** and **GIZ**. Its central device is a **mandate: states must develop their own reuse policies**. The framework and both state policies name treated water **Apna Jal**, our water.

The scale of the untapped resource. The Central Pollution Control Board's 2021 inventory put urban India's sewage generation at about **72,368 million litres a day** against an installed treatment capacity of about **31,841 MLD**, and actual treatment lower still. Every litre treated and then discharged into a drain is supply the country paid for and then threw away.

The infrastructure that exists. The **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)**, launched **2015**, with **AMRUT 2.0 from October 2021** under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, has done, in the authors' words, commendable work scaling sewage treatment. Their point is that the mission model builds plants; it does not by itself build users.

THE ANALYSIS

The core reframing. Treated wastewater, the authors argue, is not a **waste management problem** but an **economic opportunity**, and the case rests on hard, computable value: climate **resilience**, drought-proofed cities, reduced dependence on costly freshwater, industrial and urban growth without new stress on supplies, and low-carbon urban development. **Until that economic case is made clearly and credibly to state governments and planners, the policy will remain an aspiration.** That sentence is the piece's hinge: reuse fails not because the engineering is hard but because nobody has been made to see the money.

Why the loop stays open. Reuse succeeds only when **utilities, urban departments, irrigation agencies and industries stop working in silos**. Each actor optimises its own mandate: the utility treats, the irrigation department draws freshwater, industry buys tankers. Nobody owns the connection.

Where the money is. The authors are specific and slightly contrarian: the financing for reuse targets is **rarely found in new budgetary allocations**. It is unlocked by **identifying synergies with schemes that are already funded and moving**. That is a **convergence** argument, and it is far more implementable than another demand for outlay.

The psychological layer. Misconceptions about the safety of treated water run deep, which is why the naming matters. **Apna Jal** signals that the shift India needs is **not just infrastructural but psychological**. A policy that wins the engineering and loses the public has not won.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

THE FRAMEWORK:

The National Framework on Safe Reuse of Treated Water was published in 2022.

It was developed by the National Mission for Clean Ganga under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.

The India-EU water partnership and GIZ supported the framework's preparation.

The framework mandates states to develop their own treated-water reuse policies.

Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have notified state reuse policies under this mandate.

The framework and the two state policies name treated water Apna Jal, our water.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE:

AMRUT, the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, was launched in 2015.

AMRUT 2.0 was launched in October 2021 under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.

CPCB's 2021 inventory: urban sewage generation about 72,368 MLD against about 31,841 MLD installed capacity.

The NMCG's parent ministry is the Ministry of Jal Shakti.

THE DESIGN PRINCIPLES NAMED IN THE PIECE:

Fit-for-purpose reuse matches water quality to the end use rather than treating everything to one standard.

Blended finance combines public, private and concessional capital in one structure.

The policies integrate reuse with urban planning and river rejuvenation, with digital monitoring for accountability.

*Reuse of **treated wastewater** is not the same as **rainwater harvesting** or **groundwater recharge**, and the SRTW framework is not part of the Jal Jeevan Mission. JJM delivers **drinking water to rural households**; AMRUT handles **urban water and sewerage**; the SRTW framework governs **what happens to sewage after treatment**. Questions that swap these missions' mandates are a standard elimination trick.*

THE DEBATE

The optimists' case. The hard part is already built: a decade of AMRUT and Namami Gange investment created treatment capacity, so closing the loop is cheap relative to the capacity itself. Two states have shown the policy template works, the framework provides the mandate, and industrial demand for reliable non-potable water is real and growing.

The sceptics' case. Policy documents now exist in plenty; what does not exist is enforcement capacity, trusted quality standards at scale, or any incentive for a utility to spend on distribution to a farmer who expects water free. Freshwater priced near zero makes reused water uncompetitive by construction, and public distaste is not dissolved by renaming. On this reading the framework is a canvas, and India has a history of admiring canvases.

Where the truth likely sits. Both sides agree on the diagnosis, silos and pricing, and differ on whether the state machinery can fix what it has now correctly named. The two state policies matter precisely because they are the first test of the sceptics' claim: consultative, differentiated, finance-aware documents rather than templates. If reuse volumes in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand move measurably in three years, the model scales; if not, the canvas argument wins.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

Run any circular-economy proposal through three questions.

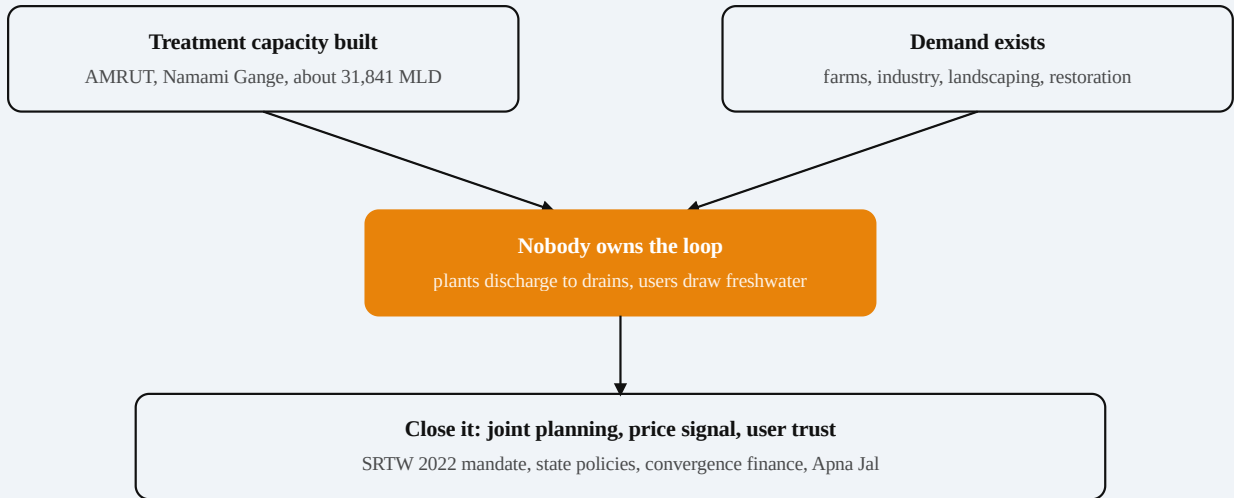
Who owns the loop? Not the input or the output, the connection. If no institution is accountable for offtake, capacity will run open-loop. Here, the answer requires utilities, urban departments, irrigation agencies and industry to plan jointly.

What does the price signal say? If the virgin resource is cheaper than the recycled one, the loop needs either a mandate or a subsidy, and the honest answer names which.

What does the user believe? Offtake is a trust decision by a farmer, a factory or a resident. Standards, monitoring and naming, Apna Jal, are trust instruments, not decoration.

The same scaffold works for plastic recycling, fly-ash utilisation and construction-and-demolition waste, which makes it one of the most reusable frames in GS3.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS



Both ends of the reuse economy already exist. The missing middle is institutional, not infrastructural, which is why the corrective is a mandate plus pricing plus trust rather than more construction.

TAKEAWAY BOX

A treatment plant that discharges into a drain rather than feeding a farm or a factory is infrastructure without purpose.

SRTW Framework 2022 by NMCG under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, with the India-EU water partnership and GIZ; states mandated to write their own reuse policies; Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand notified; treated water named Apna Jal; AMRUT launched 2015, AMRUT 2.0 October 2021 under MoHUA; CPCB 2021 inventory near 72,368 MLD sewage against about 31,841 MLD installed capacity.

Frame reuse as loop-closure with three layers: institutional (no agency owns offtake, so mandate joint planning), economic (freshwater priced near zero makes reuse irrational without pricing or convergence finance), psychological (offtake is a trust decision, hence standards, monitoring and the Apna Jal naming).

If the barrier to reuse is psychological as much as infrastructural, what should a district administrator do differently tomorrow morning?

Sources: *The Hindu*, Ministry of Jal Shakti, PIB

Source: Apna Jal: The Water India Already Has and Refuses to Use — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Writing in The Hindu, water policy experts Sonia Grover and Girija Bharat argue that treated wastewater is a reliable, drought-proof supply that India keeps discharging into drains, and that the newly notified reuse policies of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand show what contextualised policymaking looks like: fit-for-purpose reuse, integration with urban planning, blended finance and digital monitoring, rather than a one-size-fits-all template.



SUPPORTING

- India's water story repeats every summer, rampant groundwater extraction and a tug-of-war between agriculture, industry and urban demand, while a dependable supply, treated wastewater, remains unmainstreamed for agriculture, industry, urban landscaping and ecological restoration.
- Missions such as AMRUT have scaled sewage treatment infrastructure, but a treatment plant that discharges into a drain rather than feeding a farm or a factory is infrastructure without purpose; pipes and plants alone do not close the loop.
- The National Framework on Safe Reuse of Treated Water, 2022 mandates states to develop their own reuse policies, acknowledging that water solutions must be local even when the vision is national, and several states have responded with targets and milestones.
- The financial momentum for reuse targets is rarely found in new budget lines; it is unlocked through convergence with schemes that are already funded and moving, and through pricing signals that make reuse economically rational for utilities and industry.



COUNTER

The sceptical case is that reuse promises more than current institutions can deliver: quality standards that end-users trust do not yet exist at scale, utilities and irrigation departments have no incentive to coordinate, farmers fear both the stigma and the safety of reused water on food crops, and public misconceptions about treated water run deep enough that even well-designed schemes struggle for offtake. On this reading the binding constraint is not policy documents, which now exist in plenty, but enforcement capacity and trust.



WAY FORWARD

Make the economic case for reuse computable and explicit to state planners: climate resilience, drought-proofed cities, avoided freshwater costs and low-carbon growth. Break silos by making utilities, urban departments, irrigation agencies and industries plan reuse jointly.

Set quality standards that give end-users confidence, build city-level roadmaps that translate national ambition into local action, and invest in the psychological shift the framework's own name signals: treated water as Apna Jal, our water, not someone else's waste.



MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

Treated wastewater reuse has been called the most reliable, drought-proof water source available to Indian cities. Examine the institutional, economic and social barriers to mainstreaming it, and suggest a framework for scaling reuse. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

India treats barely a third of the sewage its cities generate, and reuses far less, even as groundwater depletion and inter-sectoral competition tighten every summer. Treated wastewater offers what no monsoon-dependent source can: a supply that is reliable, local and drought-proof. The question is why a resource with a clear economic case remains marginal.

BODY

The barriers sit in three layers. Institutionally, reuse falls between agencies: sewage treatment belongs to urban local bodies and missions such as AMRUT, offtake belongs to irrigation departments, industry and horticulture, and no actor owns the loop between them, so treatment plants discharge into drains, which is infrastructure without purpose.

The National Framework on Safe Reuse of Treated Water, 2022, prepared by the National Mission for Clean Ganga under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, addresses this by mandating state-level reuse policies; Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand notified theirs after consultative processes that distinguished hill communities from dense plains and embedded fit-for-purpose reuse, blended finance and digital monitoring.

Economically, reused water competes against freshwater that is priced near zero, so reuse is rational only where pricing signals or mandates make it so; convergence with already-funded schemes, rather than new budget lines, is where the financing realistically sits.

Socially, misconceptions about safety run deep, which is why the framework and both state policies deliberately rename treated water Apna Jal: the shift required is psychological as much as infrastructural. Quality standards that end-users trust, and city-level roadmaps with measurable milestones, convert capacity into practice.

CONCLUSION

Water security in India will depend less on discovering new freshwater than on the intelligence with which existing water is recycled. States that treat reuse as a strategic imperative, with joint planning across utilities, irrigation and industry, computable economics and public trust-building, will drought-proof their growth; states that stay on the sidelines are running out of time to catch up.



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