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‘Need a more sensitive approach to water planning’ Hardly a third of Chennai’s waterbodies survive, says expert

The strategy we adopt to cope with the urban water predicament has to be different, and sensitive to the diversity of the country, said water policy expert Mihir Shah.

Delivering a lecture on ‘Urban water predicament in India: A way forward’, Dr. Shah said the nature of aquifer that underlie the towns and cities of India was different. “We need to adopt diverse strategies. Planning in India is centralised and is not sufficiently sensitive to the diversity of the land. Unless you respect the land, water planning will continue to harm the growth,” he said.

Pointing to eleven key aspects required for urban water planning, Dr. Shah said people’s active participation was needed for a successful urban water planning.

“We need to protect local waterbodies. In a detailed survey of wetlands in the 1980s, Chennai had 600 waterbodies. Hardly a third of it survive now,” he said.

He urged non-governmental organisations and the civic society to focus on restoration of local river systems to prevent fresh conflicts on water between the rural hinterland and urban areas.

Dr. Shah also said there was a need for the government to create more number of urban local bodies to promote equity in distribution, participatory and decentralised waste water treatment.

Policy expert Mihir Shah says people’s participation is pivotal for successful urban water planning