



BATTLE FOR SAFE DRINKING WATER

Satkhira Resilient Water Systems Pilot Project

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Foreword

This photo-book offers a poignant look at the water crisis in Satkhira, Bangladesh, illustrating the severe impact of environmental degradation and neglect on local communities. Through powerful images from the ground, the publication aims to capture the everyday struggle encountered by the severely affected community in Satkhira’s, where polluted and drying water sources have become a symbol of their freshwater scarcity. The stories and images were collected from the working areas of **Satkhira Resilient Water Systems Pilot Project** during its first year of implementation.

The book reveals the dire state of abandoned available facilities meant to alleviate the crisis, such as Pond Sand Filters and rainwater harvesting systems, which have deteriorated due to either lack of knowledge, skills to maintain or negligence. It also highlights the extreme lengths residents go to secure water, showcasing the physical and emotional toll of their daily struggle.

While tube-wells offer a temporary solution, they pose new health risks due to high iron and arsenic levels. The publication also looks at the local community’s indigenous methods for testing water quality and various impacts of water commercialization. It addresses the broader environmental impacts, including deforestation and increased carbon emissions, emphasizing the need for a holistic response to these intertwined issues.

As the audience delves into these images, the publication not only depicts the sorrows from the grassroot, but also portrays the severe need for safe drinking water and urge to stand against perpetual adversity.

Md. Mostak Hussain
Director, Humanitarian
Save the Children

Primary Source of Freshwater

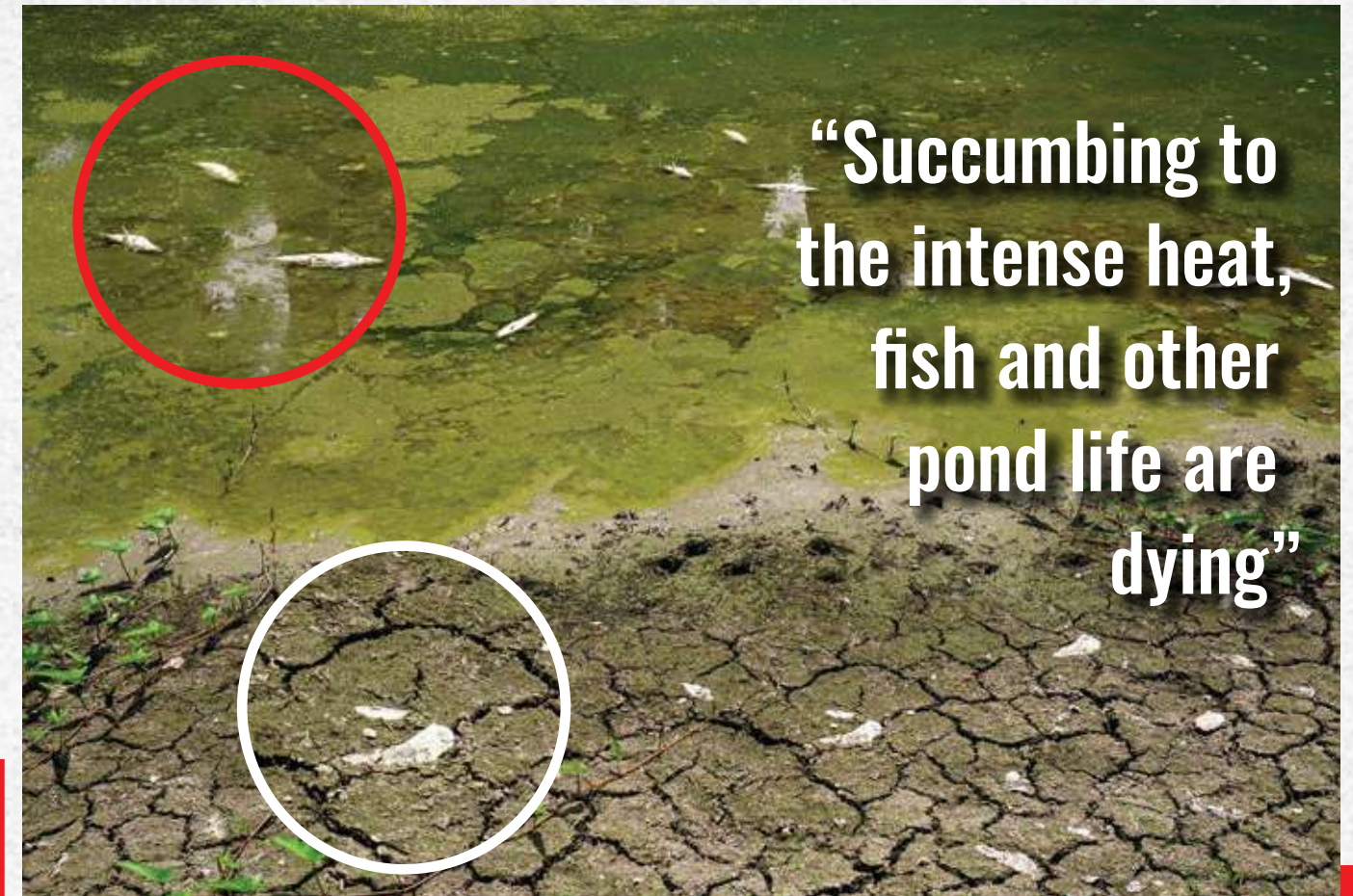
In the south-western district of Satkhira the ground water is often salty and contains increased iron and arsenic. For decades people have primarily been dependent on ponds as the source of freshwater.



People were left with no choice but to often use the same ponds used for cattle cleaning, ducks roaming, washing cloths and bathing. This has been a key reason for the spreading of diseases among the communities.



However, the number of usable ponds keeps decreasing – most often ponds are leased out for fish and shrimp cultivation filling them with salt water. This process pushes down the layer of freshwater further deep into the ground.



“Succumbing to the intense heat, fish and other pond life are dying”

The lack of timely rain and scorching heat of the summer often forces freshwater ponds to dry up. Unable to bear the intensity of the heat, fishes and other aquatic animals living in the ponds are found dead.



Abandoned Government Facilities



In Satkhira, the increasing scarcity of drinking water is exacerbated by lack of proper maintenance causing the government facilities to be abandoned.





Once-promising resources like Pond Sand Filters (PSFs), rainwater harvesters, and community water tanks lie neglected.

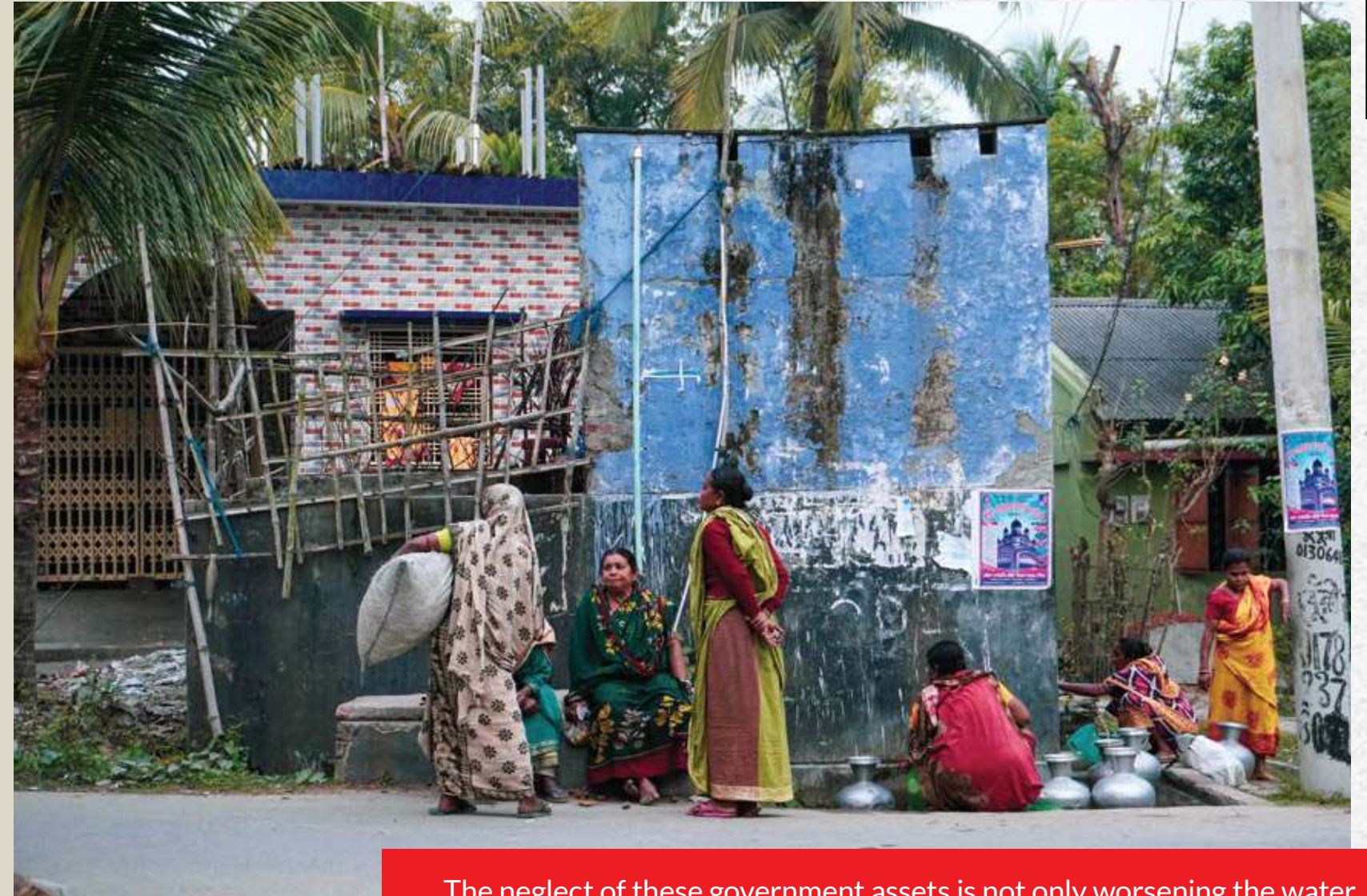


Many in government schools remain in disrepair leaving no safe drinking water source functional for the schoolchildren.





These facilities, though crucial, have been left without maintenance, forcing communities to use them despite the health risks. Contaminated water filled with tadpoles and insects is drawn from old PSFs, posing significant dangers to public health.



The neglect of these government assets is not only worsening the water crisis but also putting lives at risk, underscoring the urgent need for restoration and proper upkeep.

Walk for Water



In Satkhira, water is abundant, but it is salty and polluted. Securing freshwater for drinking is an everyday battle, and having access to safe drinking water is a luxury for many.



The daily struggle forces men, women, and even children to travel long distances, often on foot, to reach the nearest water sources.





Women walk for miles with pitchers, aka kolosh, on their waists, while men balance them on their shoulders, and some brave the treacherous journey across the river to collect water.



The more fortunate travel by van, easy bikes, or local Nochhimon three-wheelers, navigating poor road conditions that often lead to accidents.



Bad road conditions often leaves the vehicles damaged and broken. This scarcity has also led to a troubling rise in child labor, with children being pulled from school to help fetch water, risking injury on dangerous roads.

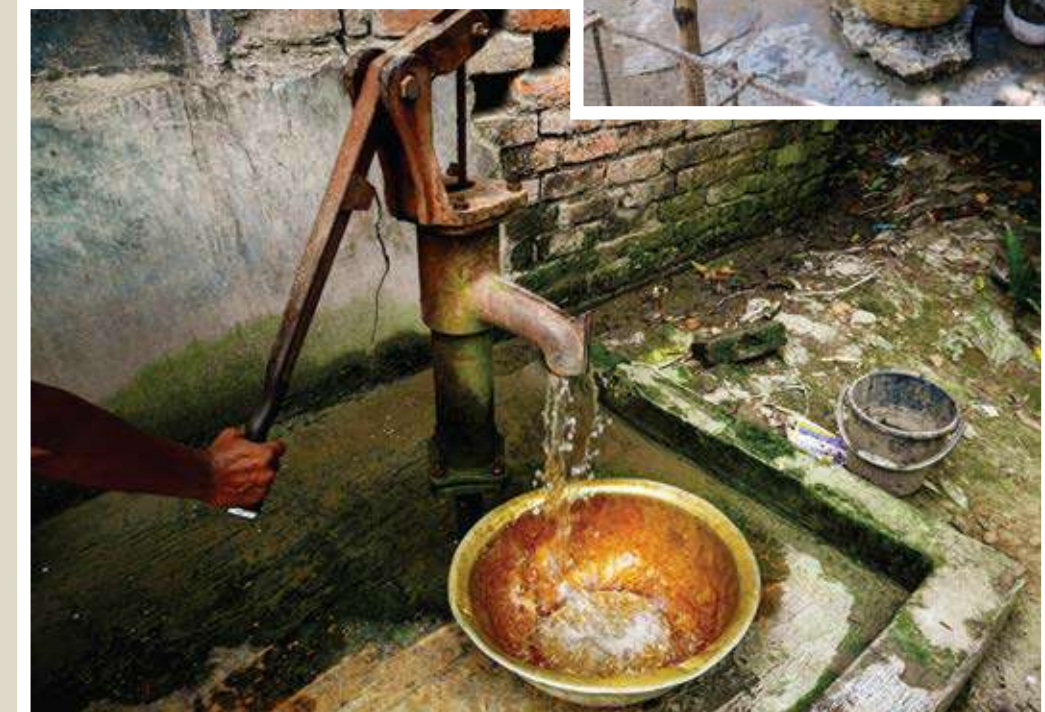


This relentless pursuit of water not only drains their physical strength but also threatens the well-being and future of the community.

Tubewell as Government and Private Solution to Drinking Water Crisis



Here, tube-wells have become a common solution to the drinking water crisis, both through government and private initiatives. However, the increased levels of iron and arsenic in the water pose serious health risks.





Despite these dangers, people continue to rely on tube-wells, having few alternatives. Children in schools, too, use these wells, unaware of the long-term health consequences.



The water often turns grey, and containers, including plastic buckets, turn reddish or even become damaged due to the high iron content.



Indigenous Testing Method



Here, the quality of tube-well water is a significant concern for the community. Local residents have developed simple, nature-based methods to test the water's safety e.g., tender guava leaves tests.

The method of using tender guava leaves: when these leaves are dipped into the water, they turn black, indicating high iron content.



The water's quality is further tested by observing its reaction with raw vegetables like brinjal, fig, and raw banana; the water not only causes these vegetables to become dark but the water itself darkens, signaling contamination.



Additionally, rice cooked with this water often changes color and develops a sour, rotten taste within a few hours, rendering it inedible.

These indicators reflect the poor quality of the tube-well water, which not only carries a bitter metallic odor but also poses health risks to the community.



Disease Outbreak

Where Drinking and Using Water is a Nightmare



In Satkhira, access to clean water is a severe challenge, and the widespread use of contaminated water has led to alarming health issues.



In many villages, people and children use the same pond for bathing, cleaning, and washing clothes, while cattle are bathed, and ducks and chickens roam freely in the same water.



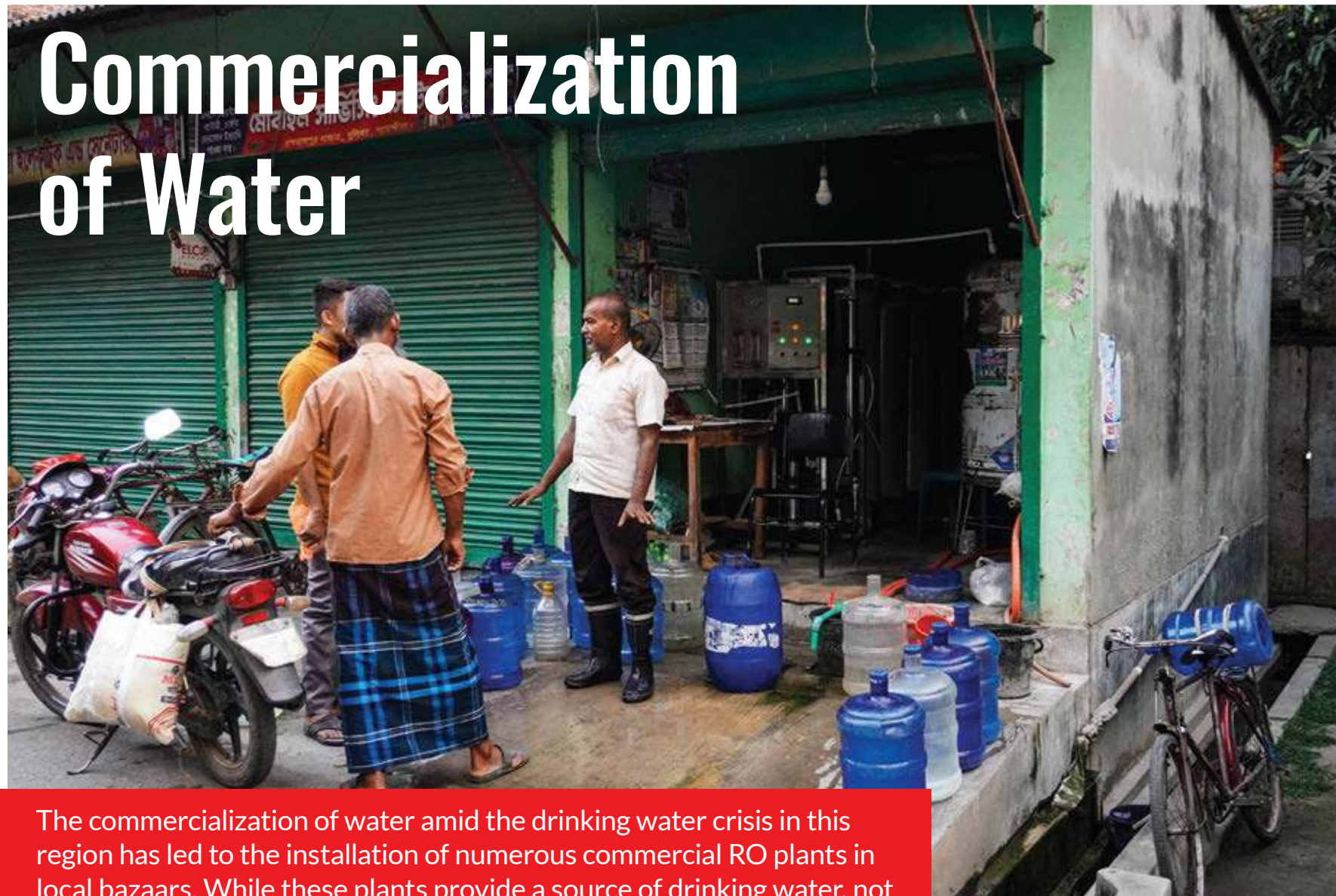
This unsanitary practice has resulted in widespread waterborne diseases. The use of this contaminated water for domestic purposes often causes stomach and intestinal irritations, gastric issues, and chronic diarrhea, affecting both adults and children.

Skin diseases have also become rampant, spreading easily from person to person due to the continuous use of polluted tube-well and pond water.



This ongoing crisis underscores the urgent need for safe and clean water to prevent further outbreaks and protect community health.

Commercialization of Water



The commercialization of water amid the drinking water crisis in this region has led to the installation of numerous commercial RO plants in local bazaars. While these plants provide a source of drinking water, not everyone can afford to buy water daily.



The water from these plants is often not properly tested or cleaned, emitting a chemical-like smell and causing stomach issues, posing significant health risks. The lack of adherence to safety measures during water transfer from tanks to consumers exacerbates these dangers. Additionally, the excessive use of RO plants is depleting the freshwater layer, driving it further underground and worsening the already critical water crisis in the region.

Increasing Carbon Emission and Reinforcing Deforestation

The quest for safe drinking water is driving increased in carbon emissions and deforestation. With limited access to clean water, people resort to cutting down trees for firewood, using logs to boil and purify water. This practice not only depletes the local forests but also releases carbon emissions into the atmosphere.



Additionally, the need to travel long distances to collect water forces residents to rely on Nochimon and other fossil fuel-burning engines, further contributing to carbon emissions. These efforts to secure safe drinking water, though necessary, are intensifying environmental degradation, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable solutions that protect both the community's health and the environment.

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