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Save Water Earn Money: A Campaign that Turns Lives of Thousand Farmers

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Abstract

In this article it has clearly portrayed the way through which water conservation has helped the farmers to turn profits. Centre has figured out ways to achieve its target of doubling farmers' income by 2022 and farmers in some villages have found already multiplied their income by conserving every drop of water and making agriculture a profit-making venture. Here in the study, the state Madhya Pradesh has set an example by changing the standard of living of localities by additional income with huge margin of profit with the help of water structure "REWA SAGAR" especially in Dewas district. Apart from these it has resulted incremental biodiversity, advanced pisciculture, assured irrigation facilities and many others. It will be further more strengthened and popularized if it could be assured with timely participation of the farmers and constant government support.

Introduction

Water is a critical input into agriculture in nearly all its aspects having a determining effect on the eventual yield. India accounts for about 17% of the world's population but only 4% of the world's freshwater resources. Distribution of these water resources across the vast expanse of the country is also uneven. The increasing demands on water resources by India's huge population and diminishing quality of existing water resources due to water pollution have led to a situation where the consumption of water is rapidly increasing while the supply of freshwater remains more or less constant. Additionally, water overuse can cause water shortage, often occurs in areas of irrigation agriculture, and harms the environment in several ways including increased salinity, nutrient pollution, and the degradation and loss of flood plains and wetlands. Indian agriculture accounts for 90% of water use due to fast track groundwater depletion and poor irrigation systems. Besides, the lack of monsoons in some parts of India will result in water shortages that lead to occurrence of severe drought incidence. The latest findings suggest that while there have been alternate dry and wet spells over the past three decades, the frequency of occurrence of drought years has significantly increased in India. Along with that, frequent and prolonged droughts spells across the country have severe impacts on the economy, society, ultimately leading to severe loss to human life. The water shortages are already acute: nearly half the country's population faces high-to-extreme water stress and about 2,00,000 dying each year due to inadequate access to safe water.

An Innovative Approach: Save Water, Earn Money

The state Madhya Pradesh, promoted as 'The Heart of India' by the state's tourism board is aptly named so because of its central location. The incidence of severe

drought in Madhya Pradesh is very common and farmers are facing its worst agricultural crisis in recent years. The frequent dry spells and irregularities in monsoon affect the lives of several farmers in the state and farmers have no option but to migrate to cities to earn and support their families. Though the government and other bodies have been instrumental in bringing some initiatives and plan to fight the issue, the dent they are trying to fill is still very big. Even if the government resolves the problem at a very creamy upper layer, and the ground-level reconstruction is still at premature stage that is also very crucial to mitigate all the damage.

In this looming situations, people in Madhya Pradesh's Dewas district are building farm ponds, and the initiative turn lives of thousands of farmers in Dewas, Seoni, and Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh for the better in the last 10 years, courtesy an idea of farmland introduced in 2006-07 by the IAS officer of Dewas 'Umakant Umrao'. Today, the idea very popular in the country and is known as 'Pani Bachao Dhan Kamao' (Save Water, Earn Money) campaign. The initiative started when IAS officer 'Umakant Umrao' visited the farmer's field in Dewas district to access the loss due to hailstone and there he observed that the villagers don't cultivate *rabi* crops due to water scarcity. He suggests the farmers dig out the one-tenth area of their land and turn it into farm ponds. These ponds store rainwater during monsoon seasons that lasted through the season till the next rain in most years. The approach soon turned into 'Pani Bachao, Laabh Kamao' (Save Water, Earn Profit) initiative that resulted in rainwater harvesting and conservation.

During the initiative, Umrao along with other agriculture officials convinced almost 40 big landholding farmers to dig a pond in their fields. The pond is 10-12 feet deep and digging of a small pond (minimum half a bigha) takes about Rs. 1.5 lakh or Rs. 2 lakhs. As it was an expensive affair, large farm holding farmers roped to avail themselves into it. Moreover, in some areas, farmers group up together and dig an unfertile land which will provide a bigger farm pond and can irrigate large number of plots together.

Reason of Success

The district Dewas has black cotton soil which runs up to 10 feet deep; followed by a 15-20 feet layer of yellow soil (pili ghumat in Hindi) and then sandy loam. This allows almost nil percolation of water, best to harvest and retain rainwater. Moreover, the small area of the farm pond can be filled within a couple of rainy days and can last through the dry spells. Together the soil conditions and smaller ponds are the major reasons for success.

How It Expanded

After the success of farmers belongs to Dewas district the farmers from other districts also start implementing the same idea. In the first year, the self-financing

campaign was named as 'Bhagirath Krishi Abhiyaan' and the farmer who dug a pond would be called 'Bhagirath Krishak' (named after the mythological water hero Bhagirath who brought down the Ganges to the earth) while their ponds were called 'Rewa Sagar' (another name of Narmada river, the lifeline of Madhya Pradesh).



Figure 1: The farm pond under the in the Dewas district (Source: Hindustan Times: Praveen Bajpai/HT photo)

After two years later, the government started a subsidy scheme; the subsidy amount was Rs. 16,350.00 with a requirement of a minimum depth of 12 feet. The amount was later increased to Rs. 80,000.00 to Rs. 1 lakh and then the scheme was called 'Balram Talab'. Today there are more than 1,000 irrigational ponds out of which 564 ones, which are known as Rewa Sagar, were made without any aid from the government. Rewa Sagar' is when farmers put in 100% of their own money. The United Nations had selected Dewas district's community water management works in the best three water management practices in the world under the category of 'Best Water Management Practices' for year 2011-2012.

Benefits of this Campaign

These structures have been quite beneficial for the farmers as they do not take up much space and they store water till the *rabi* season. Also, with the availability of water from a farm pond, which meant assured irrigation, farmers started getting winter crops too. And now, after 10 years, it is not just the additional crop that farmers can grow due to the pond, but assured water has improved the quality too. Also, in ponds water remains till the end of the second cropping season thus, wheat and gram are also cultivated along with other *rabi* crops. Due to the construction of these farm ponds the cropping intensity (ratio of the number of crops harvested in a given land each year) for Dewas district has gone up from 118 to 180% from 2006 onwards to date. After the implementation of the campaign the farming community those who were struggled to meet the ends now incoming a huge margin of profit and changing their lives.

Additional Income/ Benefits

After the success of the initiative, the farmers from Dewas and some other districts become businessmen, different farmers heir their tractor, and hired a tractor to dig or deepen the pond and earn income every year. They work from 4 AM to 11 PM and earn Rs. 250.00 per work hour. Some of the farmers who dig a big pond and have leftover water after their consumption they supply it to a neighbor or needed farmer and consume 20% of their farm output. Farmers also now able to practices pisciculture in these ponds and can earn an extra Rs. 30,000.00-32,000.00 only per year. This has doubled the income to around Rs. 60,000.00 in the span of just a few years. From an environmental point of view, these ponds retain water for the majority part of the year, as soil moisture helped maintain ecological balance, Dewas has seen an increase in biodiversity, rather it is all coming back, especially the agriculture friendly insects and birds.

Conclusion

Conserving water is important as it has helped in keeping water pure and clean while protecting the environment. Conserving water means using our water supply wisely and be responsible. Centre has figured out ways to achieve

its target of doubling farmers' income by 2022 and farmers in some villages of Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh have found already multiplied their income by conserving every drop of water and making agriculture a profit-making venture through the water structure "REWA SAGAR" which has added sustainability, biodiversity and incremental financial flexibility. This kind of innovation has got already support of government in the form of subsidy advancement and will add more successive results and set an exemplary note if it could get continuous localities' participation and government support.

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