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Jal Shakti Abhiyan for Water Conservation

A water-stressed nation, India can store only 8% of the annual rainfall she receives. The remaining water runs off into the sea. Poor rainwater harvesting and over-exploitation of groundwater has resulted in a rapid fall in the water table. The current per capita availability of water is 1545 cubic meters, about 21% of cities in India are on the brink of running out of groundwater by 2020 and there are 256 drought-prone, water-stressed districts. The Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi launched the Jal Shakti Abhiyan in July 2019, to give impetus to 'Jal Sanchay' i.e. water conservation in a time-bound, mission-mode manner.

What is Jal Shakti Abhiyan?

Jal Shakti Abhiyan focuses on five aspects - water conservation and rainwater harvesting, renovation of traditional and other water bodies, reuse of water and recharging of structures, watershed development, and intensive afforestation. This is a people's movement for creating water positive India with participation from government, scientists and academia. The key intervention areas are - Block and District Water Conservation Plan; Krishi Vigyan Kendra Mela to promote efficient water use for irrigation (Per Drop More Crop) and a better choice of crops for water conservation; Urban Waste Water Reuse - wastewater reuse for industrial and agriculture purposes. Municipalities to pass by-laws for the separation of greywater and blackwater; Scientists and IITs.

The Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS) has identified 1597 blocks across 256 districts that have 756 Urban Local Bodies (ULB) that are water-stressed. The ministry has allocated one bureaucrat to each of the 256 districts to oversee the campaign. Ironically, no additional funds were allocated for the Jal Shakti Abhiyan. The Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS) has sought an additional ₹ 50,000 crores from the 15th Finance Commission over a period of next 5 years for the rejuvenation of ponds, lakes, and rivers through village panchayats and local bodies.

The Prime Minister has called for ideas, suggestions, traditional knowledge, success stories, movies made on water conservation and water-related initiatives from the citizens and the NGOs. Every effort is being made by the MoJS to make this campaign a people's movement. The first phase of the campaign started from 1st July 2019 and will go on until 15th September 2019. The second phase will run from 1st October 2019 to 30th November 2019.

A campaign like the 'Jal Shakti Abhiyan' was a much-needed initiative to address India's rising water concerns. The alarming fall of the water table in the past decades has created multiple challenges for the country. According to NITI Aayog, the over-exploitation of groundwater has been a major contributor in creating India's water crisis. The Aayog has developed an assessment tool called the Composite Water Management Index (CWMI). The Index assesses the situation of water resources in the country and enables effective water management within the country. CWMI also measures the incremental progress made by states over a period of time and makes this data available at the state level. The overall aim of the tool is to push the states and the center to improve the water outcomes, data collection, and monitoring processes.

The data presented by the Aayog reflects the poor situation of groundwater levels in India. The reports suggest that most of the Indian states have achieved less than 50% of the total the augmentation of groundwater resources (a critical indicator theme in the CWMI Index) with 54% of groundwater wells in India on a decline. The groundwater makes up 40% of India's water supply and 63% of the irrigation depends on the groundwater.

The Abhiyan is inspired by the GOI's stimulus on Jal Sanchay (water conservation). The purpose of this campaign is to raise the groundwater levels in the water-stressed areas. The MoJS will focus on five intervention areas to increase the water table. These are water conservation and rainwater harvesting, renovation of traditional and other water bodies/tanks, reuse and recharge structures, watershed development and intensive afforestation. The selection of these intervention areas reflects the commitment of the government to develop local water infrastructure and create decentralized systems of water distribution and management.



Picture Courtesy: [Indiawater.gov.in](http://indiawater.gov.in)

This campaign, if successful will largely eliminate the dependence of the water-stressed areas on supply water being delivered from far off places. For instance, Bangalore receives much of its water supply from River Cauvery, located 100 km away from the city. Delhi receives a part of its water supply from River Ganga, 236 km away and Chennai gets its water from 30 km away. Several rural areas depend on water supplied by railway tankers. Rainwater harvesting has been around for a while, however, not much has been done about it. Many buildings lack rainwater harvesting facilities despite the government's mandate for every building in the national capital to install a rainwater harvesting unit. Rainwater harvesting is a very simple and yet effective method to restore groundwater to optimum levels.

In the past decades, the focus of the government was on investment heavy infrastructural projects such as dams and large water reservoirs. However, the restoration of natural water bodies such as aquifers and catchment areas was ignored. The Jal Shakti Ministry took this matter into cognizance and included the replenishment of traditional water bodies, recharging structures and building watersheds as a part of Jal Shakti Abhiyan. The MoJS also

recognized the role of plants and forests in the water conservation process and included intensive afforestation as an intervention area in the Jal Shakti Abhiyan.

However, just as with 'Swachh Bharat' mission, the success of the campaign depends upon the active participation and involvement of the people of India. The Small Water Enterprises (SWEs) can support the Jal Shakti Abhiyan by guiding community efforts in their intervention area with respect to reduce and reuse water education campaigns to community and school children, supporting groundwater recharge where ever possible and utilization of RO reject water in sanitation and other non-domestic purposes.

This campaign is bound to make a long term impact on the water management of the country and could completely transform the extended water ecosystem of India.