

Proceedings of the Fifteenth Water Talk held on 17th July 2020

- National Water Mission (NWM) has been organizing a seminar series-‘Water Talk’ -to promote dialogue and information sharing among participants on variety of water related topics. The ‘Water Talk’ is intended to create awareness, build capacities of stakeholders and to encourage people to become active participants in conservation and saving of water. NWM has so far organized 14 ‘Water-Talks’ on the range of topics dominating the sector concerns.
- **Fifteenth Water Talk** in this series was held on 17th July 2020 on a virtual platform-‘CISCO WEBEX’ due to Covid-19 pandemic in the country. The talk that witnessed more than 650 participants was organized by NWM with the help of Water Digest, the official media partner for the webinar. The talk was delivered by ShriMahesh Sharma, Founder, Shivganga Foundation, Jhabua. Shri U.P. Singh, Secretary (D/oWR, RD & GR) M/oJS, Shri G. Asok Kumar, Additional Secretary and Mission Director, NWM and officials of NWM attended the webinar along with more than 650 participants. The webinar included participants from across the country from various spheres of life. The talk was also live-streamed through Facebook on the official pages of DoWS, RD & GR, NWM, CWC and NMCG. The talk managed to engage more than 39,000 people through social media platforms.
- Shri **G. Asok Kumar**, Addl. Secy. & MD, NWM, New Delhi, welcomed the speaker, ShriMahesh Sharma and the participants to NWM’s third E-Water Talk. Shri Kumar in his speech, gave a brief overview of the Water Talk series and its objectives. Following the lockdown, the ‘Water talk’ series has been shifted to a digital platform. This has resulted in increasing the outreach and more than 600 participants have been attending the talk from across the country. NWM is also trying to engage more number of people by utilising different social media platforms like Facebook Live. Shri G Asok Kumar lauded the speaker for his unique model incorporating culture and tradition to bring about sustainable development and invited him to deliver his talk.
- Shri **Mahesh Sharma** thanked NWM for the opportunity to speak in the webinar. His topic for the seminar was “**Halma - A Jal Andolan: Fighting water crisis through local traditions**”. He began his talk by explaining the basic meaning and tradition of ‘Halma’ which is being practiced in the land of Jhabua since centuries. In simple words, as he puts it, Halma is a “pukaar” or a call for help. ‘Halma’ is a thousand year old concept wherein a person during the time of crisis would call for ‘Halma’ or help from his community members after all his own resources and channels for resolving the

problem are exhausted. Everyone in the village would come together to help the person in need and leave their house only once the problem is solved. 'Halma' was mostly practiced by people belonging to three communities namely; **'Bhil', 'Bhilala' and 'Pateria'**. These communities form a population of about 2 crore and are found mainly in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

- Shri Mahesh Sharma's organization '**Shivganga**' is based out Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh. He mentioned that the 'Halma' tradition was losing value and popularity in Jhabua. But 'Shivganga' managed to turn that around by utilising the practice of 'Halma' to work towards community development. In this practice, the person suffering from a crisis tries his best to independently resolve his problems to his best capabilities before calling for "Halma". The people who participate in 'Halma' come prepared with all resources required to help the grief-struck person in problem. 'Shivganga' took the help of this tradition for community service.
- **Shri Kumar Harsh, Volunteer at Shivganga Foundation** gave a presentation on the problems faced by the people and Jhabua and how the "Halma" tradition was used in eradicating the problems, bringing upon community development in the area. He explained how 'Shivganga' turned 'Halma' into a people's campaign in Jhabua. Shri Mahesh Sharma and other founders of Shivganga first moved to Jhabua in 1998. After examining the place, they came to the conclusion that water crisis is the worst problem in Jhabua.
- Taking inspiration from the success story of Bhagiratha, many programmes for water conservation were taken up for training the youth. The people were encouraged to offer water to the thirsty mother earth just like the people of Bhagiratha. Campaigns were initiated to collect rainwater, revive water bodies like ponds, check dams, lakes and wells. They were named "Shankar Jata" and fed the divine mother earth with fresh water. Efforts were made to turn the campaign into a mass movement. A "yatra" was also taken to promote the cause of social welfare of the community. However, the focus of the movement was on "activity" and not "activism", as Shri Harsh puts it. In 2010, one of the volunteers from the village suggested to incorporate the tradition of 'Halma' and make an appeal to villagers for the cause of water conservation through this practice.
- The appeal was well received by the people of Jhabua, who regularly gather at a mountain called "Hathipava" and construct contour trenches in the area every year. In the year 2018, around 12,000 villagers gathered and participated in Halma organised at Hathipava. They were joined by students from IITs & IIMs along with people from different cities across the country. In 2020, around 20,000 people came together and built 40,000 contour trenches which will enable the production of 360 crore litres of water in the next 5 years. So far, more than 1,60,000 contour trenches have been built

at Hathipava which in turn have increased the water availability in villages surrounding the area, thereby improving the agricultural production and wildlife.

- Sharing another success story from Jhabua, Shri Kumar Harsh shared that a pond which completely dried up, was revived by people by through 'Halma'. The dry area, used as cricket playground, underwent a complete transformation and now has water availability throughout the year. The evident transformation witnessed in Hathipava boosted the confidence of the villagers who felt self-sufficient in combating challenges without any support from government institutions. People started implementing similar campaigns in other areas and started calling for 'Halma' for motivating the public. While concluding the presentation, Shri Harsh added that 'Shivganga' works towards the development in five crucial areas namely; water, forests, land, people and animals. Other major works in the area of water conservation include rejuvenation of 59 ponds that can hold about 400 crore litre of water, repairing of 4500 check dams, recharging of wells and hand-pumps.
- **Shri Mahesh Sharma** pointed out that the positive changes witnessed in Jhabua were a result of people's support and participation. 'Halma' has been also utilised in tree plantation drives resulting in plantation of more than 21000 trees by local villagers. He further added that faculty members and alumni from leading engineering colleges in the country lent their technical support and monitored ponds and other water related projects in Jhabua. 'Halma' is an inclusive tradition that involves the participation of the youth, elderly and women in the village. The futuristic community development model of Jhabua can act an inspiration to others in the country. Shri Sharma emphasised that the development of villages play a pivotal role in the overall development of the nation. He concluded that with 'Halma' lies the hidden strength of a community that gives inspiration to work for the divine.
- **Shri U.P. Singh**, Secretary, D/o WR, RD & GR, M/oJS thanked the speaker for his valuable inputs on community participation and development. He shared that growing up in a village, he could relate to the tradition of 'Halma' which is a common practice in the rural parts of the country. He further emphasized the importance of participation management as the water problem is decentralized and so should the solution be. Efforts should be made on the need for practice of rainwater harvesting and people must respect the valuable resource with complete sincerity. Secretary desired to invite more such water activists who have made a real difference on ground to speak in the seminar. This would give an opportunity to share and replicate best water practices across the country.

- The talk was followed by a session of questions and answers wherein members from the audience were invited to discuss their queries with the speaker. The webinar saw some interesting and unique questions from people across the country.
