

Government of India
Ministry of Jal Shakti
Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation
(National Water Mission)

Proceedings of the Nineteenth Water Talk held on 20th November 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 18 ‘Water-Talks’ on various topics related to water sector.
- **Nineteenth Water Talk** in this series was held on 20th November 2020 on a virtual platform- ‘CISCO WEBEX’ due to Covid-19 pandemic in the country. The talk was organized by NWM with the help of Water Digest, the official media partner for the webinar. The talk was delivered by **Shri Laxman Singh, Founder, Gram Vikas Navyuvak Mandal Laporiya. 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 registered participants. The webinar included participants from across the country from various spheres of life. The talk was also live-streamed through Facebook on the 11 social media platforms of various organizations under DoWR. It was noted that there were over 30,000 viewers in this e-water talk.
- **Shri G. Asok Kumar, Addl. Secy. & MD, NWM**, New Delhi, welcomed the speaker, Shri Laxman Singh and the participants to NWM’s seventh 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. The shift has resulted in substantial increase in the outreach of the talk both numerically and geographically. Shri Kumar introduced Shri Laxman Singh as the man popular for introducing ‘**Chauka**’ system for rainwater harvesting. He continued that Shri Laxman Singh established his NGO, Gram Vikas Navyuvak Mandal Laporia that works on a variety of issues like water, child rights, forests& wildlife, nutrition & all aspects of human development. He has been successful in generating awareness about these issues turning his village- Laporia into a model village. Learning from the success story of Laporia, all its neighbouring 57 villages also adopted the above practices.
- The topic of the e-Water Talk by Shri Laxman Singh, was **Conserving Ecology & Biodiversity and securing Livelihoods through Rainwater**

Harvesting. He began his presentation by mentioning about erstwhile water problem in Laporiya. There was once a massive drought situation in Laporiya with wells drying up & people forced to step out of the village to fetch water.

- The issue that needed immediate intervention was the revamping of water bodies. A broken pond was identified & restored by him. The pond was named –**‘Annasagar’** as the pond was responsible growing “anaj” i.e. food grains. Hence, the pond water was dedicated for irrigational use. On similar lines, two other ponds were restored and named **‘Phoolsagar’** & **‘Devsagar’** respectively. All three ponds had distinct roles to play in the village. While the water from **‘Phoolsagar’** was used to recharge groundwater & improve the vegetation, flowers and greenery of the area, **‘Devsagar’** was associated with God. The area surrounding ‘Devsagar’ was groomed for public gatherings and made a tourist spot. He worked towards improving the relationship between people & water bodies of the village to make them understand the value of water. All three ponds served different purposes in the village and only water from ‘Annasagar’ was allowed to be utilized for irrigation.
- As the movement gained momentum, more people started joining the cause and started working towards development of the village. An organisation was formed by motivated individuals to encourage people to start offer “Shramdaan” and improve the village’s condition. They together channelized their enthusiasm into a powerful purpose to work towards **“Dharti Ma”** or **“Mother Earth”**, likening nature to the divine. Shri Singh elucidated the concept of **‘Chauka’** system that he introduced in Laporiya to efficiently harvest rainwater. A Chauka is a rectangular enclosure surrounded on three sides by earthen bunds or embankments. In a Chauka system, a series of these rectangle enclosures are constructed in a checker-board pattern across a natural slope and connected with shallow canals. The embankments intercept the runoff rainwater and collect it at the “down” end of the bunded field. During heavy rainfall, the water moves gradually from one chauka to another, which gives it more time to seep into the ground.
- The “Chaukas” are built slightly uphill from the village and its ponds and wells. The water collected in the chaukas replenishes the underground water aquifers, gradually filling the ponds and wells. Any above-ground overflow is directed to the village ponds via canals. The benefit of the “Chauka” system lies in its ability to retain runoff water and reduce its velocity across a slope, minimizing erosion. It also makes it easy to direct excess water to ponds for storage and improves water security during droughts.
- The pasture is known as ‘gochar’ provides extremely healthy fodder for the animals. The more the animals feed on the natural vegetation, the better is their dung. This dung acts as a natural fertiliser to grow food organically. The entire area is then over-seeded with grass and fodder tree seeds. The resulting pastureland ecosystem is incredibly diverse. Thus this natural cycle

helps the nature, man and animals to coexist in harmony. According to Shri Laxman Singh, there are now over 30 varieties of grass in the pastures, many of them with good medicinal qualities making the overall livestock's health good. The biodiversity has also attracted innumerable bird species, including ones that are near-extinct elsewhere in Rajasthan.

- The Chaukas and ponds provide sufficient water in the village, and the farmers now harvest crops twice in a year. During the kharif season, the farmers grow crops like moong, maize, jowar and wheat and seasonal vegetables, while during the rabi season, lentils are grown without the need for excess irrigation as the groundwater tables keep the moisture level of the soil intact. To spread awareness about water conservation, Shri Singh also organizes 'Padyatras' (rallies) to other villages. He has worked in 3150 villages so far and touched the lives of 6 lakh families. GVNML's efforts successfully encourages communities throughout the state to adopt the Chauka system. Delegations from as far away as Afghanistan have come to Laporiya to study GVNML's water conservation methods.
- **Shri U.P. Singh**, Secretary, D/o WR, RD & GR, M/oJS, in response to queries from students, elaborated the concept of '**Gochar**' which literally means grazing of animals. 'Go' here means cow which is a collective term for animals and 'char' means to graze. He shared that growing up in a village, he could relate to the tradition of paying homage to animals & important public entities like ponds and wells that provide the village with basic necessities. He shared that they would light 'diyas' in front of 'ponds' and 'wells' to as a mark of respect which is a common practice in the several rural places like 'Banda' in Uttar Pradesh. 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.
- 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.
