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Evolving lifestyle has moved people away from using natural and self-regenerating sources of water. Hence, rivers, ponds, and wells remain neglected. Banda, a district of Bundelkhand region, suffers from acute water shortage.

According to a study by Ground Water Board, more than 71% of wells under observation are depleting at an alarming rate, adding to the water woes of people. There was no awareness, knowledge and sensitivity towards water conservation among people, leading to household stress, low commercial productivity and overall impaired societal growth.

This initiative was undertaken with the objective to resolve perennial water crisis of all the 471 Gram Panchayats and 8 urban bodies of district Banda. This could be possible only with cooperation of the people. Therefore, educating and facilitating people to conserve water and use natural and self-regenerating water sources was necessary.

A tangible action plan was conceptualized. Before it could be implemented in the field, it was necessary to dig proverbial ponds and wells in the heart and minds of people so that they could revive their age old relationships with water bodies.



A multi-pronged approach was followed. The project was designed to ensure that people at the grassroots level, administrators and technical experts were involved and a platform for a sustainable solution provided to them.

A Jal-To-Jan Aandolan was envisaged. As a part of collaborative approach mass ownership was prioritized as the fundamental strength. A District level Water Committee, headed by District Magistrate and comprising key officials from all water related departments, civil society members and technical experts was created.

It was realized that the society has begun to neglect natural & self-regenerating water sources and has a fabricated inclination towards 'bottled water', symbolically speaking. This has led to the current water crisis, accelerating depletion of ground water-level. Basic knowledge, awareness,

motivation and scientific guidance towards water conservation was lacking in people. And, lack of proper initiative and implementation has resulted in inadequate, superficial, short-term solutions, which do not yield results.

Several activities were undertaken to address the situation, as mentioned below:-

- a) **Jal Choupal:** Training and awareness camps were held in each gram panchayat and urban centres to educate people about the idea and benefits of water budgeting and importance of water conservation. Jal choupals were conducted in all 471 gram panchayats.
- b) **Trench digging:** Water-retention trenches were dug around hand pumps and ponds, thereby enabling rain water to seep through and add to the ground-water level. 2605 trenches were dug around 2443 hand pumps and wells with a conserving capacity of 3,930 kilolitres saving 1.10 Lakh Kilolitre water annually.



- c) **Rejuvenation of old water sources:** Many old hand pumps, wells and ponds that had dried and become unusable due to negligence, were rejuvenated.
- d) **Creation of new ponds:** With the help of local residents, local ground parcels were identified and transformed into ponds. Rain water stored during monsoons acted as a boon providing additional water supply in the region.
- e) **Rain water harvesting:** Rain water harvesting systems were built in government office buildings, setting an example to be adopted at community level.
- f) **Jal March:** A mass walkathon was organized across the city of Banda in which students, professionals, local traders, NGOs, residents of Banda and many others participated. The objective of Jal March was

to increase awareness and educate people about the water conservation efforts and inspire them to make it an individual mission.

- g) **Deep Daan:** Considered a very auspicious ceremony, Deep Daan activity was conducted again to re-emphasize the significance of natural water bodies and how they need to be loved and respected as they are the source of water, an essential for life. This attracted masses and captured their mind space.
- h) **Tree plantation & Medbandi:** Tree plantation on the banks of river and ponds along with Medbandi of farm boundaries helped achieve reduction in soil erosion and wasteful flow of water.
- i) **Jal par Kavita & Mushaira Sammelan:** To reach out to people, kavi sammelan and mushaira on 'water' as the theme. Through poetic creativity and



entertainment, the message on water conservation reached the masses in an engaging manner. Adding momentum to the initiative **Jal-Hasya-Charcha** with a celebrity comedian as guest was also organized.

As a result of the efforts of District Administration, 572 old ponds were revived; 840 new ponds created, 1536 recharge pits built, Medbandi done at 1311 locations and 82 rain water conservation structures were built. 34,732 villagers have benefitted directly and 15 lakh indirectly. Average water table across Banda increased by 1.34 m and due to increased availability of groundwater average increase in agriculture productivity is 18.48%. Law & order in the district also improved after elimination of water crisis.

A very low cost model it was implemented through 'Shram-Daan' and pooling of resources. The keys to success lay in bridging the people-administration gap, strategic pooling of resources in a channelized manner, revisiting childhood life experiences to explore optimum solutions. It was a people's movement.