

## Why it is critical to involve people in solving water woes

The Union government has finalised [a Rs 6,000-crore scheme to tackle the country's](#) depleting groundwater level. The Atal Bhujal Yojana, which is now awaiting the Union Cabinet's clearance, will be launched in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Haryana, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, covering 78 districts, 193 blocks and more than 8,300 gram panchayats. Half of the Rs 6,000 crore will come from the government's budgetary support and the World Bank will give another Rs 3,000 crore.

This scheme comes at a [very critical time for the country](#). According to a World Bank report, about 245 billion cubic metre of groundwater is abstracted each year in the country. This figure represents about 25% of the total global groundwater abstraction. In the past four to five decades, 80% of the rural and urban domestic water supplies in the country have been dependent on groundwater, the report added. Nearly two-thirds of India has underlying hard rock formations, which allow water to recharge only very slowly. The excessive extraction of groundwater, the debilitating impact of climate change on monsoons, which recharges aquifers, and lax implementation of water harvesting laws will impact not just the population's drinking water needs, but also agriculture and industrial growth.

The most heart-warming aspect of the scheme is the sharp focus on community water management and behavioural change. The government plans to give 50% of the money to states, including gram panchayats, as incentives for achieving targets in groundwater management. The remaining 50% of the funds will be given to states for strengthening institutional arrangements such as providing a strong database and scientific approach to help them accomplish sustainable management of groundwater. Certain states of India, such as Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, have shown the benefits of aquifer management. For example, instead of blaming the monsoon and fate, farmers in water-stressed Anantapur district have formed a collective – Kolagunti Ummadi Neeti Yajamanya Sangham --- to “share groundwater with each other” to sustain their crops. In Telangana, several villages in six districts --- Mahbubnagar, Ranga Reddy, Warangal, Medak, Karimnagar, and Adilabad --- are also piloting a similar participatory groundwater management programme. This is the way forward, and it's heartening to note that the government has finally taken note of such solutions.

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