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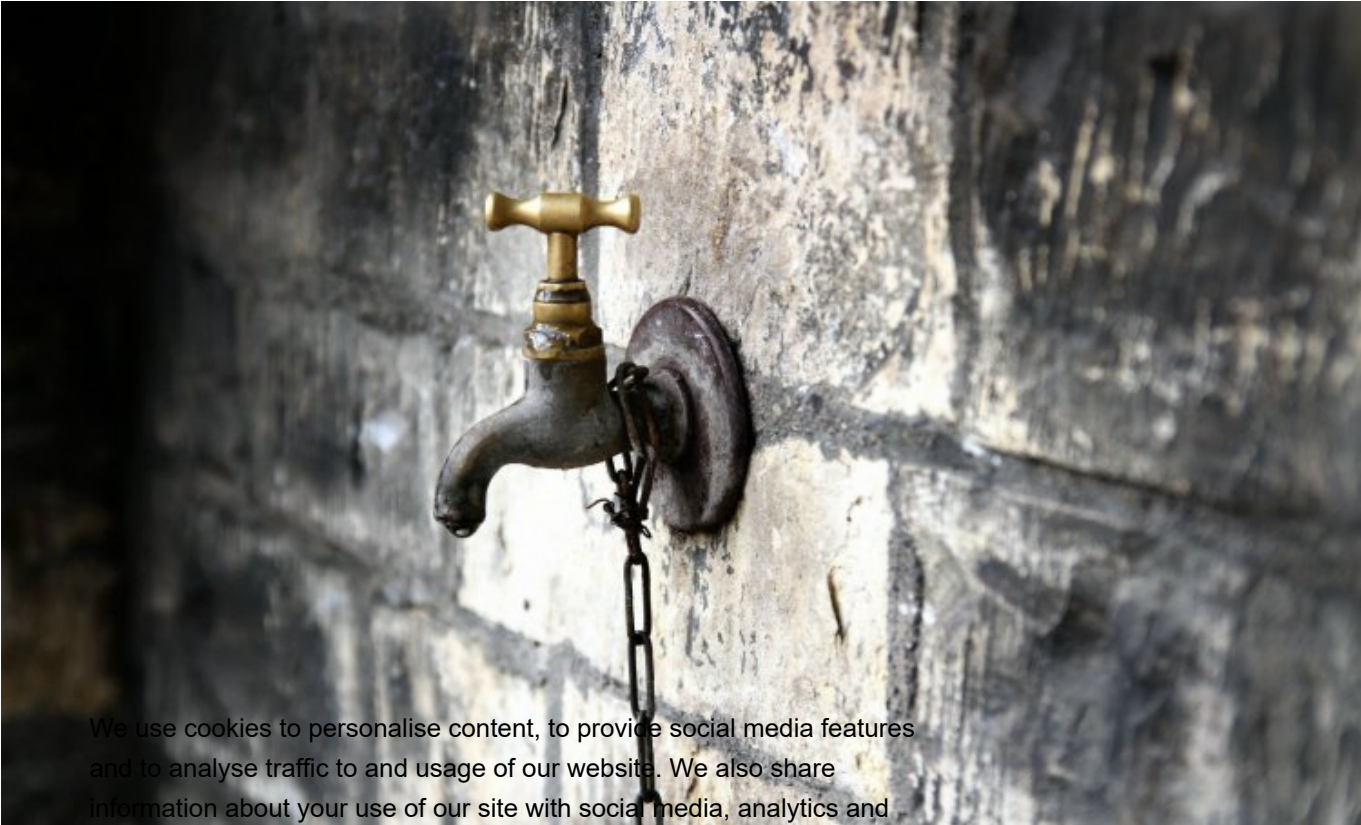
SEARCH



Community-led piped water supply initiative in Bihar

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For Har Ghar Nal Ka Jal to succeed, the state needs to look at water harvesting to augment groundwater availability.



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The community-led piped water level of the panchayat is supposed to have complete ownership of the system created. (Image: GG Vogman, Flickr Commons, CC BY-NC 2.0)

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Water is a precious natural resource that ensures human well-being. However, across the globe there is a severe water crisis, which is heightened by issues of inaccessibility and contamination. “The right to water and sanitation is a human right (<https://news.un.org/en/story/2010/10/354542-right-water-and-sanitation-legally-binding-affirms-key-un-body>) equal to all other human rights, which implies that it is justiciable and enforceable” (UN Human Rights Council, 2010).

The United Nations World Development Report (2019) demonstrates how improvements in water resource management and access to water supply and sanitation services are essential to address various social and economic inequities so that “no one is left behind” when it comes to enjoying the multiple benefits and opportunities that water provides.

Niti Aayog estimates that 600 million Indians face high to extreme water stress (<https://niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2019-08/CWMI-2.0-latest.pdf>). India is in the grip of acute water shortage. Eighty-four per cent of rural households do not have piped water. In the wake of such statistics, the Government of India launched the *Jal Jeevan Mission* in 2019 to provide tap water to all rural households by 2024.

Water issues in Bihar

The state of Bihar, despite its abundant natural resources, perennial rivers, and fertile lands, grapples with water quality problems. Of all the contaminants found, excessive iron and biological contamination remains the most prevalent and pervasive risk in the region.



Rural people in villages depend on *chapakals* (hand pumps), which are usually 25 to 30 feet deep. Studies indicate that water from this depth had high levels of iron contamination, which is very detrimental for health. Potable water is available at 200 to 350 feet depth but borings are costly, so people are forced to consume the contaminated water.

Bihar also bears the brunt of climate change. Due to changes in rainfall patterns, it is prone to floods and droughts. The main source of water for the people is groundwater. Due to droughts, groundwater levels have

gone down drastically in many parts of the state, leading to drying of hand pumps and bore wells. There is a widespread civil outcry due to drying up of ponds, water reservoirs, lakes, etc., as these help recharge the water table and provide water for irrigation and livestock.

The shortage problems are further magnified by water contamination. Rural populations are the worst affected as they have no money to order, repair and pump water. That is a considerable size of the population looks up to the government to address the myriad water issues they face.

The Bihar government under the *Saat Nishchay* (https://navbharattimes.indiatimes.com/state/bihar/patna/bihar-cabinet-gives-nod-to-implement-nitish-kumars-saat-nishchay-yojna/articleshow/51059937.cms) scheme prioritizes good governance and as a

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part of it, seven commitments are to be implemented. Of the seven commitments, *Har Ghar Nal Ka Jal* (piped water supply to every household) provides clean and safe drinking water to every citizen in Bihar by connecting all households with a functional piped water connection.

This scheme, to be completed in a phased manner from 2016 to 2020 is being implemented at the ward level of the panchayat. The community at the ward level of the panchayat is supposed to have complete ownership of the system created. For this purpose, a committee will be formed to maintain and operate the supply of water.

Expectations from the “Water for all” program

Samastipur district in Bihar faces a severe shortage of drinking water during summers. The *Har Ghar Nal Ka Jal* scheme is under implementation in select blocks of the district and the local population is receiving benefits. “Most of the hand pumps in the ward have dried up due to drought, and this scheme is really helpful in providing drinking water,” says Pholo Devi of Simri village in Khanpur block.

In village Tiwari Tola in Patori block, people are using the water supplied through this scheme. “People are relieved from the hassle of going to far-off places to find drinking water. This scheme has come at the right time, when villagers are facing a severe shortage of drinking water,” say Ram Sakal Singh of Udaypur village in Khanpur block.

Groundwater in over 102 blocks of nineteen districts



(<https://www.prabhatkhabar.com/state/bihar/patna/1277455>) of the state has dried up. In Samastipur district, the groundwater level has dropped to 30–35 feet in sixteen panchayats. The increase in demand for water in summer and its decrease in availability have heightened the curiosity among people for this scheme as villagers want it implemented as soon as possible. People are jamming roads and carrying out protests for accelerating implementation of this scheme and improving the availability of drinking water.

Need to preserve the river network

Bihar has a wide network of rivers. River water can become a source of drinking and irrigation with less chance of iron and arsenic contamination. There is an urgent need to preserve groundwater by preventing its excessive exploitation.

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Harvesting rainwater for sustainability

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The *Har Ghar Nal Ka Jal* scheme has given temporary relief to people, but to ensure availability of water in the long run, proper water management is needed. Even in this scheme, if the system of redressal of complaints is not quick, there may be leakages, contaminated water, or no availability of water, which may lead to the scheme becoming defunct in a village. This scheme, if properly maintained, can help in unnecessary water wastage and will be able to provide water to all.

Bihar does not have any surface water management systems due to which groundwater is drying up at a fast pace. A check is needed in the boring of tube wells and hand pumps. Fines and punishment must be imposed on illegal boring. Through piped water supply, the government will be able to provide water to people and also be able to regulate it. The scheme largely relies on groundwater resources that are fast depleting. A paradigm shift is needed to harvest rainwater to ensure that the pressure from groundwater sources can be relieved.

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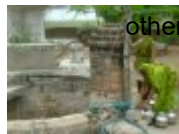
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