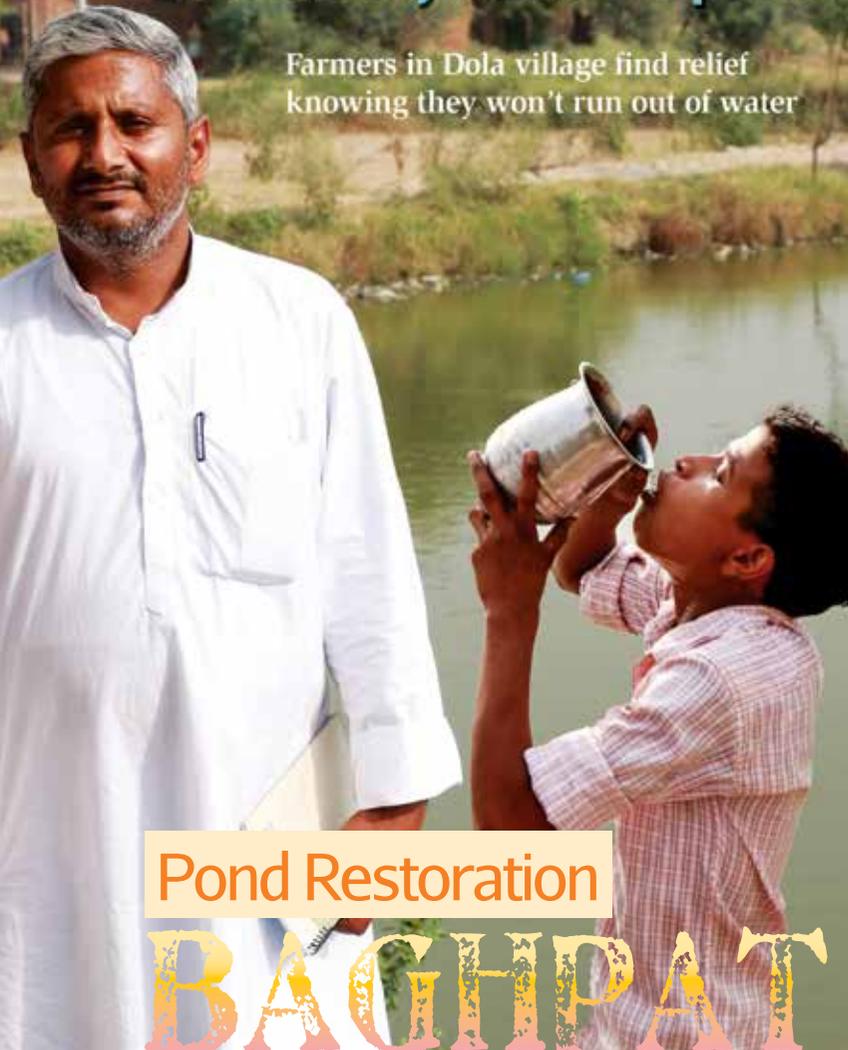


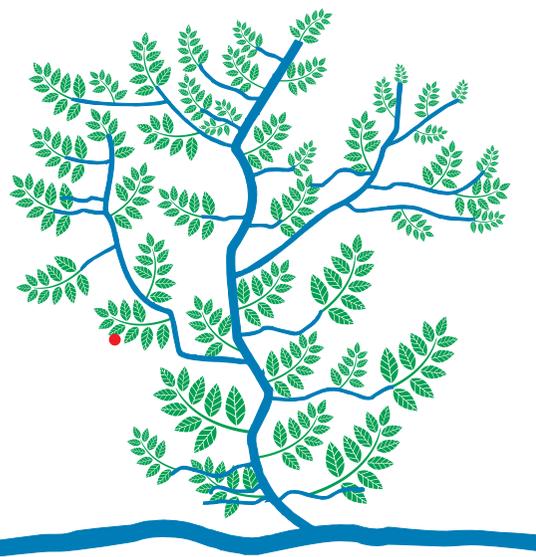
A Model Village in Baghpat District Rejuvenates 17 ponds

Farmers in Dola village find relief knowing they won't run out of water



Pond Restoration

BAGHPAT



A proactive **community** and a **responsive** district administration set a water **agenda** for themselves. Supporting each other in **reviving** as many as **17 ponds**, they have enlisted help from different quarters, scaling up their own **capacities** to undertake the task of **rejuvenation**.

Community takes initiative to build its capacity for pond rejuvenation

A group of concerned farmers realised they had to address the problem, lest be faced with a situation jeopardising their agricultural productivity and existence. Krishan Pal Singh, coordinator for the Jal Biradari network's¹ Northern Uttar Pradesh chapter and Chairman of the NGO, Grameen Awwam Paryavaran Vikas Sanstha in Baghpat district is a resident of Dola village. He was familiar with issues related to water conservation and had been following the pond revival work carried out in Alwar district, Rajasthan by Ramon Magsaysay

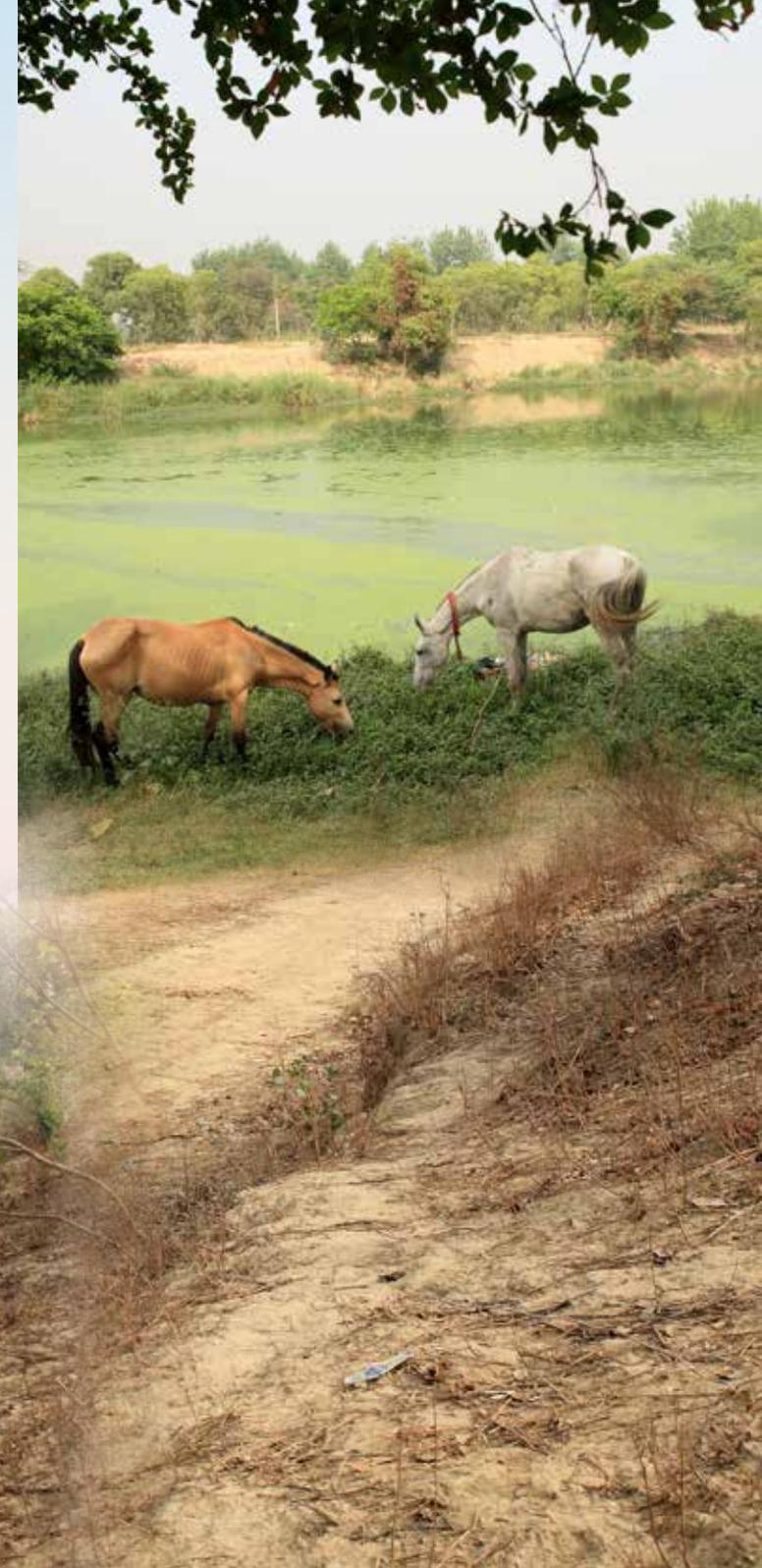
¹ Rashtriya Jal Biradari is a network of like-minded individuals, CBO's, farmers groups, NGO's, research institutions, social scientists and water experts who have deep interest in issues related to water



Award winner Rajendra Singh also known as the “Water Man of India. Krishan Pal along with the village Sarpanch and few volunteers undertook an exposure visit to Alwar district urging Rajendra to help them find a solution to their water crisis. Rajendra needed a proof of intent and told them to undertake a community project before he could commit his resources to helping them develop a larger program on pond rejuvenation.

Dola village is known for its ponds, in fact there is a pond for every community. In the days of yore, access to ponds was restricted based on caste; while today even though they still are referred to by the name of the community, the water belongs to everyone. Krishan Pal and his group of “water warriors” first set about reviving the “Harijan talaab” which had long been dead. Being a

community led initiative, they requested all village residents to make donations ranging from Rs. 5 to Rs. 500 despite the villager’s scepticism. With an initial sum of Rs. 5000, they began by cleaning the pond with help of shramdaan (Contribution in the form of labour). When the monsoon arrived, the pond gradually started filling up and hesitant residents began pledging their support to the group. Enthused by their initial success, Rajendra Singh along with his NGO Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS) decided to act as a partner and donated Rs. 20 lakh with a large portion coming from his Ramon Magsaysay Award prize money. In 2004, Krishan Pal, the community along with TBS drew up a Pond Rejuvenation plan by identifying the ponds in the village with support from the district administration. The smallest pond





was 4-5 bigha (measure) of land while large ponds were 60-70 bigha of land. With the help of a consultative process between district administration and the village community, pond encroachments were addressed to a large extent. By the end of 2006, seventeen of these ponds were revived with their water used for irrigation and livestock; neighbouring villages started adopting this approach.

The pride of Dola is the Gossain pond which is the oldest in the village, it has sufficient water for up to 6 months post monsoon. A walking track has have been laid around the pond inviting families to visit in the evening. Village resident who lives in the vicinity has been tasked with maintaining the pond, discussions are ongoing with district administration to further develop this pond as a recreational spot.

District administration provides direction, support and an enabling environment

Overall, the Baghpat district administration has been very supportive and even appreciative of the way the community has stepped forward to play a major role in pond rejuvenation. The current District Magistrate, Hriday Shankar Tiwari Tiwari has taken the work of his predecessors forward by coming up with a proposed action plan of shortlisting ponds for revival in each of the 46 Nyaya Panchayats in the district. This will be a people's project involving local community, religious leaders and village sarpanch(s) together with district administration providing funding. The initiative is expected to begin with 5 ponds being chosen and work scheduled to be completed before the monsoon season begins. In addition, a prayer campaign is being planned in schools that extols the virtue of water with clear do's and don'ts. This would raise the awareness levels among children which in turn would spread to their parents.

Baghpat district's success in restoring as many as 17 ponds that had been encroached upon or forgotten by harvesting rainwater is now being seen as an example that can be emulated even in neighbouring districts. The success has translated into a larger campaign across Western Uttar Pradesh linking people to ponds as well as rivers such as the Hindon.

REFLECTIONS

Initiatives such as the rejuvenation and restoration of village ponds needs to be encouraged.

However, if the purpose is to arrest the ground water depletion, then these initiatives alone cannot achieve the purpose. Promoting ground water recharge is essentially supply side management and not the demand side management. No matter the amount of ground water recharge, it will continue to deplete so long as the ground water withdrawal is more than the recharge (which is the case today in most of the places). One also needs to appreciate that ground water storage does not necessarily follows the village boundaries, it follows the ground water aquifer boundary which may spread over very large area covering many villages. Therefore, key to sustainable ground water management is to demarcate the ground water aquifers and ensure that water uses for various purposes put together in any given aquifer is such that the balance between ground water recharge and water withdrawal is not disturbed. This would require a comprehensive ground water balance study at the aquifer level and not the village level.

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