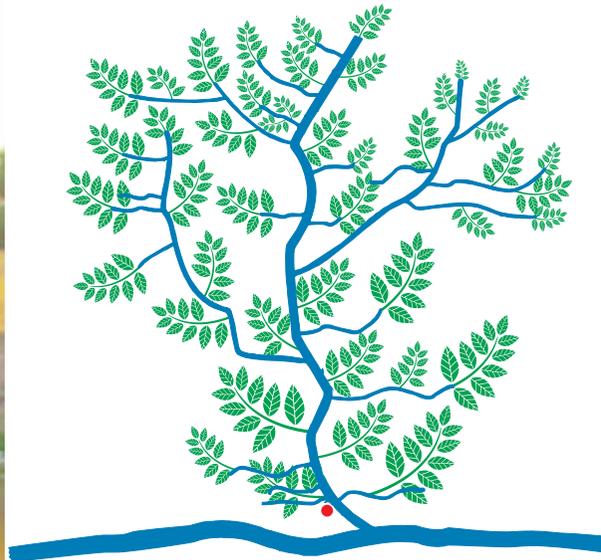


Mission Pond Rejuvenation through Multi-Stakeholder Participation



Local bodies, communities and district officials join hands to revive 240 ponds

NOIDA



At a recent meeting with Akhilesh Yadav, Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh, the Prime Minister tweeted, “use of latest technology and community participation can play a key role in effective drought management for planning of water conservation and recharge.” While farmers and parched fields across western India await showers eagerly, special committees have been formed in the districts along the Hindon basin to urgently identify, dig up, desilt and restore village ponds, so they can be ready to brim with clean rainwater. Much hope hinges on the monsoon of 2016.

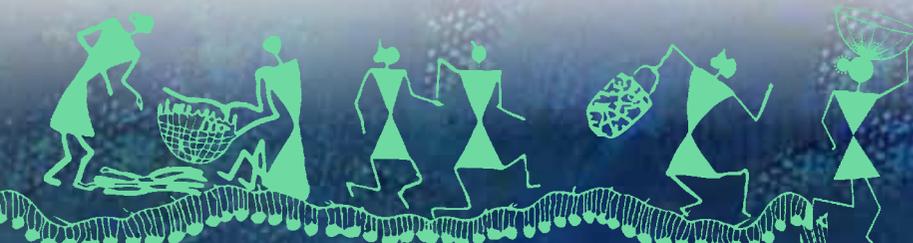
“Ground water is receding rapidly. If we continue this exploitation we will be without water very soon. Ponds can be the lifeline of both villages and towns.”

Rajesh Kumar, Additional Divisional Manager, Finance and Revenue for Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh

Target driven Pond Rejuvenation Plan

The Gautam Budh Nagar district administration will use the upcoming monsoon as an opportunity to strengthen water conservation and recharge efforts by undertaking desilting, building of check dams, recharging of rivers and other water storage mechanisms.

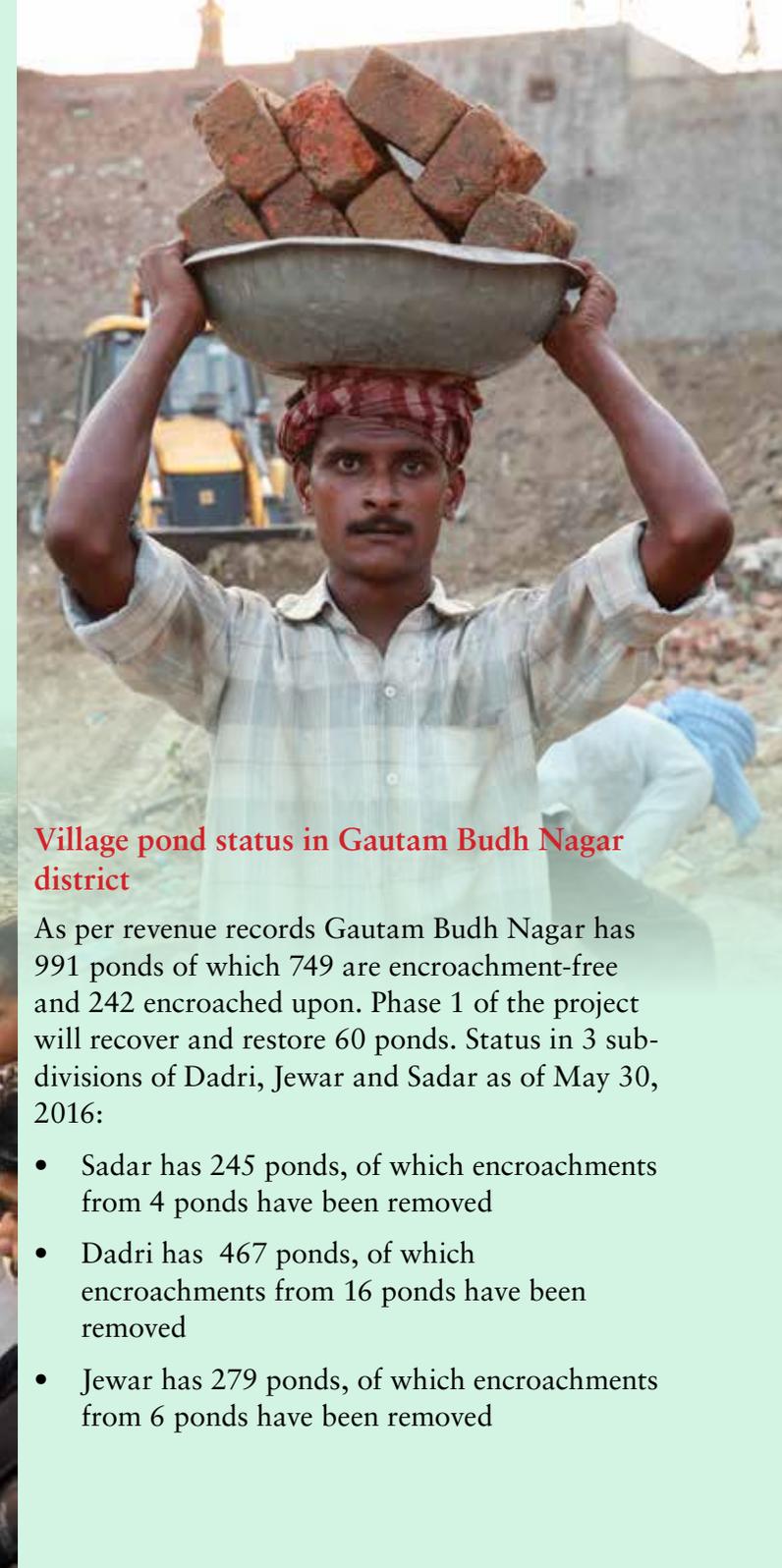
According to Rajesh Kumar, Additional District Magistrate (F/R), the district has plenty of ponds but no water. Most have been encroached in different forms. The process of identifying them in itself was a huge challenge. For instance, revenue officials discovered places where families had built brick and mortar homes and were living there for years. The District Administration is taking the help of local NGOs, industry and community members to rehabilitate these dispossessed families.



Replenishing ponds, a major strategy for efficient use of natural water resources

A status report on groundwater by the National Capital Region Planning Board (NCRPB) has drawn attention to dipping ground water levels in and around the capital. With population growth, rapid urbanisation, an upward looking economy and rising standards of living this is only going to get worse. In the absence of a broad framework for rainwater harvesting and a plan to save the disappearing of ponds and lakes, the

Planning Board identified 45,000 recharge structures that are expected to yield approximately 1 bcm of groundwater annually. This can be done by desilting ponds and creating artificial recharge structures in both urban and rural areas. Identified locations include areas in the Aravali ridge, abandoned quarries, encroached village ponds, flood plains of Yamuna, Ganga and Hindon, in addition to institutional and residential buildings.



Village pond status in Gautam Budh Nagar district

As per revenue records Gautam Budh Nagar has 991 ponds of which 749 are encroachment-free and 242 encroached upon. Phase 1 of the project will recover and restore 60 ponds. Status in 3 sub-divisions of Dadri, Jewar and Sadar as of May 30, 2016:

- Sadar has 245 ponds, of which encroachments from 4 ponds have been removed
- Dadri has 467 ponds, of which encroachments from 16 ponds have been removed
- Jewar has 279 ponds, of which encroachments from 6 ponds have been removed



Innovative strategy for funding pond reconstruction activity

The Pond Rejuvenation Plan of Gautam Buddh Nagar covers both urban and rural areas. Major construction activity is being undertaken in the urban areas of Greater Noida. Builders and construction companies are being requested to undertake cost of digging up abolished ponds as part of corporate social responsibility. Corporate houses, public and private organisations, Resident Welfare Organisations and individuals with a philanthropic bent of mind are being approached to fund the task and support it with related activities like organising talks, awareness programmes on water conservation. In some places, soil will also be sold and money pumped back into the pond rejuvenation effort that entails using of earth moving equipment, water sprinklers and labour.

Ponds in rural areas will be funded by local bodies and in some cases community themselves. Once the pond is ready, it will be used for irrigation purposes, cattle grazing and in some cases where there is more than

one pond in the village, leased to fishermen. The money earned from the arrangement will go to the village fund for development work.

Communities to take charge for maintenance of freshly recharged ponds

For maintenance of the ponds the district administration is envisaging active participation by the community. A Land Management Committee has been formed headed by the village pradhan with a revenue department official represented on it.

The town Jewar has a pond that is 3 metre deep, covering an area of 3220 square metre. Digging work began on 25th of April 2016 and is on track for completion before monsoon. Funds have been released so that the mud that is being dug up can be transferred to low lying areas in the village. The Committee is simultaneously working with the forest department to build structures and plant trees. Awareness sessions are being held with schools, Mahila mandals and adolescent groups on pond maintenance, management of solid waste and garbage disposal, open defecation and air and water pollution.



REFLECTIONS

The Pond Rejuvenation Plan is a commendable initiative of the District government. To optimise such rain water harvesting structures, information on the catchment area and existing drain infrastructure would be important design considerations. Once water is stored in the ponds, potential pollution from household drains and sewage disposal may raise new problems. Gravity could also bring septic tank overflow into the ponds. Experience shows that pond areas are often used to dispose of solid waste by local inhabitants as well. To ensure that the revived ponds will stay healthy a Pond Maintenance and Solid Waste Management Plan would be recommended to be developed with involvement of the community in each village or town. Only then the restored ponds will continue to fulfil multiple social and eco-system services to sustain life for people, flora and fauna.

Nitin Verma, SustainAsia and Dr. Veena Khanduri, Executive Secretary, India Water Partnership.