

# Kutch villages protect water table with community wells

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Ahmedabad: As the state reels under water scarcity this summer staring at empty dams on minor rivers, several areas in Kutch are still satiating their drinking water needs from carefully managed groundwater.

A total of 300 villages of four talukas on coastal area - Abdasa, Mandvi, Mundra and Anjar - are involved in an aquifer management project for the past four years.

This summer has showed a marked difference in several, if not all, villages that are part of the network.

Prakash Gadhvi, sarpanch of Mota Lajja village in Mandvi taluka, said that while the water table in the village still takes digging 250 feet to 300 feet to reach, the difference from conservation efforts is visible.

"We used to have individual wells, but after the project, community wells have been constructed at better places. The water level has not come up in past four years, but neither has it gone down significantly," he said.

Samat Gordiya, sarpanch of Gadhvala Vada village in Abdsasa taluka, said effort is also on to replenish the underground water resources as his village has deepened an existing lake to harvest rainwater. "Drinking water is still available, but water for farming is scarce," he said.

Yogesh Jadeja of Arid Communities and Technologies (ACT), a Bhuj-based NGO, said that the district of Kutch depends heavily on groundwater, and for past few years it was observed that there was no check on depleting resources.

"Thus, we decided to map the aquifer of Kankavati sandstones covering four talukas and take stock of the situation. The sandstone provides water to a population of 5.43 lakh and also supports industries in the region," he said.

The mapping took place five years ago along with Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) as three of the four talukas were declared 'dark zones' with high TDS and over 50% saline water.

"The need was to create the awareness that aquifer - the natural subterranean water source, in this case ranging from 50 feet to 250 feet below ground level - was a shared resource and should be conserved. We approached various villages and formed 'Kankavati Sagpan Bhugarbh Sarita Vyavsthapan Manch' for participatory management. Exact aquifer mapping marked the areas under severe stress due to rampant bore wells in the region," said Jadeja.

Jadeja added that the results so far are encouraging.

"It is one of the few projects at aquifer level going on in India, with such a large population base. The best takeaway is to get people along and use scientific methods whenever possible," he said.

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