

## PRESS RELEASE

### Smarter irrigation can help avert water crises

To ensure *Har Khet Ko Pani*, Gol should emulate irrigation policies followed by Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, say researchers.

(New Delhi, 30 May): As parts of the country struggle to recover from some of the worst droughts in living memory, improved irrigation policies could help avoid such problems in future, as well as boosting food production and farm incomes. India nationally can learn from the radical approaches adopted by Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh which have already shown how better water management can benefit farmers.

That was the message emerging from a policy consultation organised by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) held at the India Habitat Centre today, and attended by, among others, Amarjit Singh, secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, Dr Sandeep Dave, Joint secretary, Neeranchal administration, IWMP and Mr Jeremy Bird, Director General, IWMI.

“We have to improve the management of irrigation systems to ensure that our investment delivers.” Said Dr Amarit Singh adding that comprehensive planning besides demand side management is required. He also appreciated the value and timing of IWMI’s inputs.

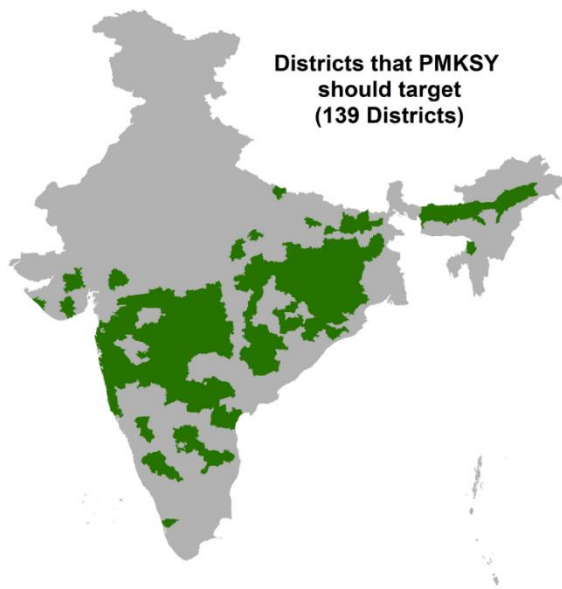
Jeremy Bird, IWMI’s Director General added, “IWMI is undertaking action based research to help better inform policy making. We should look across sectors with multiple benefits and work on common priorities by focusing on innovation in policy, technical aspects and management.”

“After 67 years of irrigation investment, 6.8 crore out of India’s 13.8 crore farm holdings have no source of irrigation whatever,” said Tushaar Shah, leader of IWMI-Tata Water Policy Program, a 15 year old research partnership between Tata Trusts and IWMI, which is based in Colombo, Sri Lanka, but has offices in New Delhi and Anand.

“The objective of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana should be to provide sustainable quality irrigation to the 6.8 rainfed farm holdings,” Shah added.

IWMI-Tata research has confirmed that new policies have enabled Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have expanded irrigation coverage by over 10 percent/year. Irrigation expansion has helped these states achieve agricultural growth rate above 10 percent per year during recent years.

As currently designed, PMKSY will hardly reach the 139 districts that comprise India's irrigation-deprived geography, say the researchers. Less than a quarter of farm holdings in these regions have any source of irrigation while in states like Punjab, Haryana and Tamil Nadu, over 90% of farm holdings have secure irrigation.



All these 139 districts are located in the central Indian highlands, tribal Rajasthan, eastern India and the Deccan region. Their agricultural productivity here is one third of the productivity in 100 most irrigated districts.

A majority of these districts have large unutilised groundwater potential which can be further enhanced by watershed development and Managed Aquifer Recharge programs. But Adivasi farmers dominating this geography can benefit from this only if they are assisted to dig wells and install pumps.

IWMI-Tata researchers argued that the best way of accelerating irrigation in these Adivasi districts is through assistance to groundwater irrigation by providing farmers wells and solar pumps. States like Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh which invested massive sums of money on large dams and canals have experienced no increase in irrigated area.

Tata Trusts' celebrated *Lakhapati* farmers program in tribal districts of Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh begins with giving farmer a well and a pump before introducing her to high value farming system, Shah said.

Under its current design, PMKSY will largely bypass this 'unirrigated half' of India. Large dams and canal projects take 15-20 years to complete. Drip irrigation is of no avail without wells and pumps. Watershed development too helps multiple cropping but only with well irrigation. But PMKSY does not include groundwater development, say the IWMI-Tata researchers.

Without a groundwater development component for the country's irrigation-deprived geography, Shah argued that it is neither possible to ensure *Har Khet Ko Pani* nor to double farm incomes in five years.

IWMI-Tata researchers divided the country into 12 distinct clusters according to their irrigation development challenges and opportunities and recommended a clutch of interventions appropriate to each. Shah argued that redesigning PMKSY along these lines will take the country closer to the vision rolled out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

### Additional information

- The **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)** is a non-profit, scientific research organization focusing on the sustainable use of water and land resources in developing countries. It is headquartered in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with regional offices across Asia and Africa. IWMI works in partnership with governments, civil society and the private sector to develop scalable agricultural water management solutions that have a real impact on poverty reduction, food security and ecosystem health. [www.iwmi.org](http://www.iwmi.org)
- The **IWMI-Tata Water Policy Program (ITP)** is a partnership between the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Colombo and The Tata Trusts, Mumbai. The program presents new perspectives and practical solutions derived from the wealth of research done in India on water resource management. Its objective is to help policy makers at the central, state and local levels address their water challenges – in areas such as sustainable groundwater management, water scarcity, and rural poverty – by translating research findings into practical policy recommendations. Through this program, IWMI collaborates with a range of partners across India to identify, analyze and document relevant water-management approaches and current practices.
- The **CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE)** combines the resources of 11 CGIAR Centers, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and numerous national, regional and international partners to provide an integrated approach to natural resource management research. WLE promotes a new approach to sustainable intensification in which a healthy functioning ecosystem is seen as a prerequisite to agricultural development, resilience of food systems and well-being. This program is led by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), a member of the CGIAR Consortium and is supported by CGIAR, a global research partnership for a food-secure future. [wle.cgiar.org](http://wle.cgiar.org)