

Global water meet: Indian Farmers hailed

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London : Citing examples from West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, a Stockholm-based water management institute has said that small-scale irrigation schemes could protect millions of farmers from food insecurity and climate risks.

The report by the **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)**, titled 'Water for wealth and food security: Supporting farmer-driven investments in agricultural water management'; was released at the ongoing World Water Week in Stockholm.

According to the report, expanding the use of on-farm water management techniques could increase yields up to 300 per cent in some cases, and add tens of billions of US dollars to household revenues across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Researchers looked at these trends in six countries, including in India's West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, a press release from **IWMI** said.

Tushaar Shah of **IWMI** said: "When farmers and those who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods are at the mercy of global food prices, water scarcity can have tragic impacts. But Indian farmers are increasingly tapping local, small-scale solutions for their water needs to great success." The three-year AgWater Solutions Research Initiative unearthed for the first time the scale at which enterprising

small-holder farmers themselves are driving this revolution by using their own resources innovatively rather than waiting for water to be delivered, the release said.

"What surprises us is not just the pace of change but how widespread it has been," Ravinder Malik, who coordinated the initiative in Madhya Pradesh, said.

"Farmers themselves are taking up this challenge finding their own solutions to high start-up costs and poorly developed supply chains because their crops cannot grow

without efficient irrigation technology," he said.

In Madhya Pradesh's Dewas District, for instance, more than 7,000 water harvesting structures have been built by farmers on their own land and with their own financial

resources within a period of less than 4 years.

The district administration however provided logistical support and facilitated construction of these structures, the release said.

The research, a collaborative effort involving several international partners and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, provides the best evidence to-date on the scale and potential economic benefits of small-holder water management in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

The report cites the example of innovative farmer Raghunath Singh from Harnavada in Dewas District in Madhya

Pradesh.

A steep decline in local water tables had led to a spate of tube-well failures.

His farm was badly affected, but he took the initiative and was the first person in the district to construct a private rain water harvesting pond on his farm, the release said.

Singh's success catalyzed the development of more private rainwater harvesting structures in the district as other farmers enthusiastically adopted the new approach.

Singh was so pleased with his new reservoir, and so determined to encourage others, that he organised a big "funeral" procession for his tubewell.

Malik said: "The solutions for effective water management are already with us. Cheap pumps and new ways of powering them are changing how Indians farm and how much revenue their crops generate. Even drilling wells more quickly and capturing rainwater more effectively can make a difference during the dry season."