

Nitin Gadkari Appreciates Sikkim's Dhara Vikas Initiative

The Rural Management and Development Department (RMDD) was invited by the office of the Hon'ble Union Minister, Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation to present the Dhara Vikas Initiatives of the State. The Department was represented by Addl. Secretary cum PD – MGNREGA, Mrs Sarika Pradhan and Dr.Subhash Dhakal, OSD – RMDD. The meeting was chaired by Shri Nitin Gadkari, Hon'ble Minister for Water Resources and was attended by the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Chairman of Central Ground water Board, Regional Director, Central Ground Water Board, Secretary and Joint Secretary of Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.

The Rural Management and Development Department (RMDD) is entrusted with the responsibility to provide drinking water supply in the rural areas of the state. It is a daunting task, as it requires work to be done in extremely challenging physical landscape of the mid-hills (900 m -3000 m) with scattered households on the fragile slopes. Glaciers and snow-fed rivers flow much below the habitations in the valleys with no scope for utilization. The provisioning for water is thus met by tapping water from small springs and streams. According to *Sikkim First*, an economic and political journal, about 65,000 (nearly 80%) of the state's rural households depend on springs for drinking water and irrigation. Until the springs were perennial, the task was only to manage the distribution system. However, the ever growing demand for water due to population increase and rapid transformation in land use and land cover on the one hand and impact of climate change on the other hand has exerted immense pressure on the limited water resources. Most of the springs are drying up or becoming seasonal leading to acute water scarcity during the dry season especially from December to May. According to Meteorological Department, rainfall, as a principal source of natural recharge for these aquifer systems in itself, is undergoing change wherein we are experiencing a reduction in a number of rainy days. Well-distributed rainfall in the form of a drizzle spread over a number of months is now received in the form of a heavy down pour in few months. Thus, the availability of water during the dry season and the rainy season varies drastically, resulting in too-little and too-much syndrome.

The outcome of the prevailing situation has directly affected the women and children living in the rural areas as they have to spend the best part of their time fetching water for household needs. This also has affected the agricultural practices and livestock management. The impact is apparently in their economic condition, health, and hygiene at the household level and in rural schools and other local institutions.

As a part of Climate Change adaptation and recognising the urgent need for ensuring water security, the Rural Management and Development Department (RM&DD), conceptualised the Dhara Vikas initiative to revive the state's drying springs. The core thrust of Dhara Vikas is to catch the surface runoff water and use it to recharge

groundwater. The initiative was funded from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), with technical support from other government agencies and organisations like WWF - India; People's Science Institute, Dehradun; ACWADAM, Pune Arghyam, Bangaluru and others. The programme has been evolving over the years basically in a **“Learning by doing”** mode as there were no models for spring revival available to replicate in the State. Success of the programme is also being measured by people's perception and works are on to scientifically back this up with data and studies.

The Hon'ble Union Minister was impressed with the pioneering initiative of the State for its simplicity and effectiveness. He has asked his Ministry to see how this initiative can be upscaled to other Himalayan and North East states where the same is replicable. He has further requested that the State present this initiative in the Bhujal Manthan being organised by the Central Ground Water Board on 16-17th of February 2018. The main objective of the Bhujal Manthan is for brainstorming interactions applying collective wisdom amongst various researchers, stakeholders, water managers engaged in ground water resource management and policy planners to give attention to role of ground water in irrigation, water conservation & recharge and participatory ground water management and sustainability.

