



## **Jal Swaraj (Water Sovereignty) of the Indigenous Communities for the Larger World**

### **Water: A Basis of Life**

Water is basis of life for all the living things surviving on this planet. It has a unique significance in the life cycle of humans, animals, plants and all living things. Since eternity, water holds a special cultural, spiritual and social significance. Being an invaluable element in the life of everyone, it is intimately linked with the social and cultural development of humanity and building a healthy ecosystem. The ‘sovereignty of water’ which was seen as the governance by the communities over water resources, which fundamentally included the control over its usage and regulation of its contamination, had remained a priority for the communities for years. But due to increasing population and eventually increasing demand for water, the usage of water also increased, which was not equitable and sensible. Water, started being treated as a commodity for trading, which is becoming a threat to the upcoming generations and also to the ecosystem. Besides, the water sector in developing countries and the tribal areas have been facing several issues related to its management, such as (a) erratic distribution of rainfall (b) water use inefficiency; (c) unregulated groundwater extraction; (d) water pollution; and (e) decreasing water quality due to poor waste management laws. Various processes and practices, such as soil conservation, afforestation, cultivation of indigenous crops requiring less inputs, and others, using which water could be conserved and utilised easily and efficiently, are getting diminished gradually.

### **Water Sovereignty for Indigenous Communities**

For years, the indigenous people have been worshipping water and its sources. They are the true custodians of the natural resources of the mother nature. The indigenous communities had traditional methods and culturally aligned practices of water conservation and harvesting like their circular lifestyle, which is significant in promoting restorative and regenerative processes helpful in climate resilient agriculture. Such practices also help them in reducing their dependency on external environment and make them self-reliant for their livelihood, food, and nutrition security. But nowadays even they are facing several challenges in terms of water sovereignty. It is important to identify, encourage, revive, and replicate the traditional methods of water conservation, and work on other associated factors including Community-based Water Governance, which is an effective approach to ensure equitable, efficient, and prioritized use of water.

### **Key Recommendations**

As long as water is used as a commodity, one cannot think of bringing its sovereignty. When everyone is able to realize its aliveness and consider it as a component of nature, then only its sovereignty could be protected. The following few recommendations highlights various measures to be adopted at various level for protecting the water sovereignty:



### Household Level

- ◆ Adopting agriculture technologies like Sloping Agriculture Land Technology, increasing cropping intensity by creating small farm-ponds on sloping terrains, mulching, zero-tillage, drip or sprinkler irrigation, organic and natural farming and others at wider level for retaining moisture in the soil and reducing water usage.
- ◆ Increasing usage of indigenous crops and seeds in cultivation as these require lesser inputs compared to high water intensive crops and seeds as well as are helpful in keeping soils healthy.
- ◆ Reducing fertilizers and pesticides use in fields as it increases water consumption and also its excessive usage can lead to its seepage and contaminate underground water.

### Community Level

- ◆ Communities need to participate in the governance process for getting their water usage related issues resolved.
- ◆ Encouraging, reviving and replicating the traditional methods of water conservation and harvesting, being practiced by the indigenous communities, in other areas as well. Establishing local seed systems for producing indigenous seeds could be effective and helpful in water conservation.

### Governance Level

- ◆ Establishing and reinforcing community based and community led water governance systems at village, regional and national level, to ensure the reliable delivery of water for prioritized usage.
- ◆ Water related issues at local level like crop selection, appropriate seeds and agriculture technologies to be adopted, industries to set-up and others should be discussed and decided, ensuring community participation.
- ◆ Promoting agro-forestry and developing community forests at commons could be helpful in maintaining high water quality, influence the volume of available water, and regulate surface and groundwater flows.

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