

State Level Stakeholder Consultation on Participatory Groundwater Governance in Madhya Pradesh, India

Learnings from Atal Bhujal Yojana and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)

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Background

International Water Management Institute (IWMI) is an international, research-for-development organization, with a global network of scientists operating in more than 55 countries including India. IWMI has recently undertaken a study on Political and Institutional Landscape Analysis through the lens of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and *Atal Bhujal Yojana* (ABY). The study was conducted in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. In Madhya Pradesh, IWMI partnered with the Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) for this study to address the capacity-building needs as identified through this study.

The study used a qualitative approach to understand the governance and implementation of the two schemes, both of which have a focus on better convergence of resources and a bottom-up approach in governance and natural resource management, especially groundwater. The objective of our study was therefore to develop better insights into the policy processes in India and identify interventions or innovations required to make them more inclusive and effective. Two major learnings from the study were the necessity of developing the soft skills of leadership and community mobilization within the community for scaling Participatory Groundwater Management (PGWM) and integrating scientific tools for facilitating bottom-up decision-making.



Group photograph of participants of the workshop at Hotel Marriott International, Bhopal on 4 September 2024.

Purpose of the Workshop

The purpose of the workshop was to facilitate deliberations on strengthening the bottom-up approach in policy governance and natural resource management in India. The workshop began with the welcome by Saheb Bhattacharyya from PRADAN, and introduction by all the participants. Thereafter Archisman Mitra, Regional Researcher, International Water Management Institute (IWMI) provided a comprehensive background on the CGIAR National Policies and Strategies (NPS) initiative highlighting IWMI's current work related to the Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABY) and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Inaugural Address

Mr RK Gupta, Project Director SPMU-ABY welcomed all the guests and participants, and emphasized on the primary goal of Atal Bhujal Yojana, which is water conservation with a strong focus on community participation and stewardship, especially within Madhya Pradesh. He discussed the development of village-level intervention plans tailored to local needs. He further emphasized on introducing smart irrigation systems in horticulture, aiming to enhance efficiency and sustainability. He expressed interest in forming partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) and research institutes to further these objectives.

Ms. Prachi Jain, from MGNREGA, echoed the welcome and highlighted the department's significant role in the Atal Bhujal Yojana, mentioning that Rs 104 crore spent on developing water harvesting and water conservation activities. There after Mr Purushottam from Srijan, shared their experiences in water conservation within the Bundelkhand region, specifically focusing on community management of the Chandela water tank. He discussed efforts in managing conflicts between farming and fishing communities, ensuring that both groups' needs are met. Also, Kumar Ranjan from State Planning Commission, stressed on the importance of equity and justice in achieving sustainability, particularly in the context of water security in Bundelkhand. He noted that understanding social dynamics is crucial for successful water management. He also emphasized the need to consider cultural perspectives and the importance of developing actionable points. He called for making relevant data publicly available to ensure transparency and informed decision-making.

Session – I

(A) Political Economy of Bottom-up Governance: Lessons from Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABY) and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

The presentation was done by Ms. Suchiradipta Bhattacharjee, Researcher- Water Governance.

Ms Bhattacharjee did a detailed presentation on key learnings from both MGNREGA and the Atal Bhujal Yojana, drawing on experiences and outcomes to guide future efforts in water management.

MGNREGA	Atal Bhujal Yojana
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased Community awareness of the demand-based nature of the scheme resulting in better demand and bottom-up planning. ▪ Increased women participation, for example number of women mates considering feminisation of MGNREGA. ▪ MGNREGA remains a major source of income during lean periods and crisis situations (Covid-19) ▪ Increased convergence with JJM, Amrit Sarovar, and other schemes. ▪ Productive assets for NRM increase the scope of employment & environmental benefits, GIS planning. ▪ Convergence for implementation of structures with ABY and other schemes has helped overcome the challenge posed by 60:40 ratio in budget allocation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gradual progress in community awareness on both the need and steps for GW conservation ▪ Instruments installed & Data Collection on GW – Open Data Management Structure (Visible) ▪ Decentralized planning - Ensure Assets created combine the scientific and technical accuracy with lived experience of communities ▪ Coordination across line departments; develops network across departments ▪ Improved technical expertise of DPMU (District Project Management Unit) and DIPs (District Implementation Partner) (<i>“Data helped us to improve our technical capacity” - DMPU</i>) ▪ Convergence for implementation of structures proposed in WSP

She further highlighted the stakeholder wise challenges observed in MGNREGA and ABY.

MGNREGA

Community

- 100 days of employment currently not achieved.
- Delayed receipt in payment, cancelled payments due to failure in attendance uploads.
- Back subsidy for individual assets
- Increasing usability of the structures

Gram Panchayat

- Low material rates compared to markets.
- Shrinking community spaces for NRM interventions (limited extent)

Block/District

- Limited technical capacity of personnel involved in planning.

State level

- Timely availability of funds

ABY

Community

- Localised training at GP/Anganwadi, missing out villages/community members (already addressed)
- Lack of technical understanding of WB/WSP
- Selection of trainees

DIP (District Implementation Partner)

- Retaining experts/personnel, especially at village/GP level
- Limited expertise of block and GP level personnel

DPMU (District Project Management Unit)

- Data integration from line departments

SPMU (State Project Management Unit)

- Data integration from line departments
- Nodal point of contacts at line departments

At the end of the presentation, Ms Bhattacharjee discussed the learnings from the field. In case of MGNREGA she emphasized on creation of productive assets through involvement of Gram Sabha. Convergence of fund from different schemes could be solution to the problem of fund availability and systemic bottlenecks (60:40 ratio in budget). Role of technology must be improved for better performance, it is possible through capacity building of the human resources (tech literacy, awareness of permitted work) on use of technology and improving the entire ecosystem. The scope of capacity development also exists for community in addition to community, i.e. better awareness of entitlements under and processes of MGNREGA.

Ensure records are current and precise to improve management and transparency and improve decision making. Equip participants with necessary technological skills and updating of documents like Aadhar Card to overcome implementation barriers.

Convergence can play a vital role for resource availability, inter departmental convergence not only helpful in resource availability but also in accessibility and utilization of data/information for better planning and execution. Convergence with CSOs and increased stakeholder interaction will be helpful in community mobilization, monitoring, and course correction.

Social audit is instrumental in bringing transparency and can be and can be emulated in other schemes also. Scientific assessment of structures can give further insight regarding the feasibility and technical viability etc. Community involvement from asset planning to creation gives higher community ownership on rural assets.

In case of *Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABY)*, she emphasized on selection of District Implementation Plan (DIP) is most crucial for implementation. Creating more scope for cross learnings among States, improving in training (integration of decision-making tools, behavioral Games for capacity building on governance). The idea could be explored about incentivizing Panchayats based on indicators of their ability to reach the wider community. Increased administrative resources are required for example dedicated person in line department. More time is required for community mobilization as 2 years have gone because of the COVID and finally Behaviour changes towards GWM.

The session also revisited the challenges and learnings addressed in the previous consultation workshops, reinforcing similar issues and solutions.

The session facilitated the questions and discussions and highlighted the necessity for continued collaboration, technological improvements, and community engagement to address the challenges in water management and employment programs effectively. The discussions and presentations underscored the importance of strategic planning and the implementation of practical solutions to overcome these obstacles.

The next presentation was on *Scientific tools for facilitating bottom-up decision-making in MGNREGS* by Ms Garima Taneja, Research Officer-Economics, IWMI.

Ms. Taneja introduced the MNREGA impact monitoring tool, detailing its functionality and importance in assessing the effectiveness of MNREGA initiatives. The tool is designed to track and evaluate the impact of various projects under MNREGA, ensuring that the goals of employment generation and sustainable development are met.

Basis of the Tool

- The tool uses approximately 100 input indicators to derive around 15 output indicators.
- Key input indicators include structure dimensions, gross irrigated area created, and the number of beneficiaries. Data for these indicators is collected using ODK, an open-source mobile data collection platform.
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- Employs a unique asset ID system for tracking and measurement.
- Tracks these output indicators to measure performance.
- Provides a unique identification for each asset created under MGNREGS.

She further informed that the tools have been implemented in 3 states, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala and total 10800 responses have been recorded till date.

This is an excel based tool will be helpful for outcome measurement and will be helpful for technical officer, ground level staffs.

In brief, the ODK tool developed by IWMI, aimed at enhancing decision-making processes in MGNREGS through the measurement of outcomes. The tool's deployment in Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala marks the beginning of its application. The subsequent Q&A session demonstrated a strong interest and engagement from the audience, indicating a positive reception towards the tool's potential benefits.

Post these presentation, Q/A session was introduced for presentation by Ms Suchiradipta on Political Economy of Bottom-Up Governance and Ms. Garima Taneja on Scientific Tools

A participant inquired whether agroecology was considered in the study. Ms Suchiradipta responded that the study primarily focused on governance aspects rather than agroecological approaches. There were discussions on initiatives related to crop diversification and the provision of specific training to farmers. Efforts to raise awareness about water budgeting and the use of water flowmeters were highlighted, emphasizing their role in helping communities realize the importance of efficient water usage. A question was raised regarding the monitoring tool Ms. Taneja presented. She clarified that it is currently in a pilot phase and is being tested across three states. Participants expressed concerns about the possibility of groundwater contamination, seeking insights into how these risks are being mitigated. The discussion touched upon the need for a state-integrated water policy, the potential impacts of the Ken-Betwa Link Project, and the possibility of reverse migration because of these interventions. The conversation explored challenges in mobilizing communities and the factors that lead to either active participation or disengagement. It was noted that while water scarcity often acts as a trigger for strong community action and decision-making, mobilization issues persist on the ground. The need to address challenges in changing farmers' behaviors, particularly in reducing dependence on groundwater, was highlighted as crucial for the success of crop diversification efforts.

Presentation by PRADAN Team

Ms. Archana and Ms. Krishna from PRADAN showcased the training modules they have developed, which are designed to equip community leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively manage water resources and promote sustainable practices within their villages. These modules are tailored to the specific needs and contexts of the communities in Chhatarpur and Panna.

Highlights of the discussion after the presentation of the key findings

- Prevailing agriculture production systems have a profound impact on groundwater. While Atal Bhujal Yojna and MGNREGA are aiming at raising collective consciousness around conservation and prudent use of water, the agriculture growth trajectory in the state underscores a completely different pathway. The expansion of irrigation potential historically has paved the way for more water-intensive crops replacing inherent crop diversity (often rainfed low water-intensive crops). Therefore, it is important to understand the priorities of agriculture policy and create incentives in the production system for the primary producers to adopt sustainable water management practices.
- Governance and management of groundwater have to be cognizant of the future of the local area economy and its potential impact on water use. Changes in the demography, livelihood choices, the emergence of new economic opportunities etc inevitably would impact groundwater. Therefore, water security planning must have a reasonable foresight and must aligned with the future water demand in the area.
- BIWAL (Bundelkhand Initiative for Agriculture, Water and Livelihood) a collaborative-based initiative has demonstrated (a) an integrated approach bringing together water, livelihood and participatory management of water and (b) multi-stakeholder (CSO) collaboration for the cause. How the insights from the BIWAL initiative can inform ABY and MGNREGA processes?
- Although flagship programs such as ABY, MGNREGA along CGWB (Central Ground Water Board) have been trying to put relevant information and data in the public domain for informing policies as well as practices, still a comprehensive approach to deal with the intertwined problem of natural resource, livelihood and equitable access of different socio-economic groups to the natural resources demands for more proactive disclosure of the public data in the public domain. ABY, in this context, has been a groundbreaking initiative that acknowledges

groundwater as a common property resource and makes a significant amount of specific data available in the public domain.

- Water Security and Climate Adaptation in Rural India (WASCA), a comprehensive tool developed by IWMI for monitoring the impact of MGNREGA interventions, particularly around water conservation, has been piloted in three states. The early findings are encouraging (4500 responses). If rolled out by the states in the coming years, it can significantly improve the understanding of the impact of assets created under MGNREGA.

Session II

The next session was a Panel Discussion on “*Capacity build need and potential strategies for strengthening grassroots governance and community leadership in the context of Atal Bhujal Yojna*”, was moderated by Ms. Garima Taneja, Research Officer, IWMI

Panel Members were

Mr RK Gupta, Director, SPMU-ABY, MP

Mr Manoj Jain, Senior Advisor, AIGGPA

Mr Vivek Dave, Joint Commissioner, Rajiv Gandhi Watershed Mission

Ms. Krishna Tiwari, Team Coordinator, PRADAN

Mr. Avinash Alok, State Coordinator, GIZ

Mr. Vivek Bhatt, WALMI, Madhya Pradesh

Panelist: Mr. RK Gupta, Director, SPMU-ABY, MP

Mr Gupta highlighted that there is a critical need for a grassroots approach to groundwater management. By empowering communities and integrating scientific tools, we can ensure that our policies are not only effective but also sustainable in the long run and emphasize the primary goal of the ABhY, which is water conservation with a strong focus on community participation and stewardship. The development of village-level intervention plans tailored to local needs and collaboration with CSOs, and research institutes are required to further the goals of ABhY in Madhya Pradesh.

Panelist: Mr. Manoj Jain, Senior Advisor, AIGGPA

Mr Jain flagged that the Gram Panchayats as the custodians of the natural resources (within the GP boundary) need to be empowered and entrusted with greater responsibilities as well as resources to effectively regulate use, manage and govern commons.

Panelist: Mr. Vivek Dave, Joint Commissioner, Rajiv Gandhi Watershed Mission

Mr Dave stressed that watershed programs have shown the ways of community-led governance and management of natural resources. However, water is still not an agenda that shapes political discourse. We have rarely seen political establishments talking about water in the context of smallholders. Community participation in water management and governance must find support within a responsive political system, which is an area of acute deficit.

Panelist: Ms. Krishna Tiwari, Team Coordinator, PRADAN

Ms Tiwari said that water availability and access to water affects women disproportionately negative. The shortage of drinking water in the summers increases the drudgery of women as they are primarily responsible for household chores. Therefore, women and their collectives must be part of the solutions-finding processes. We have seen resistance from society when women started visiting Gram Sabhas and other public forums but over time it has been normalized. We are very much convinced that the pursuit of a bigger cause can bring a fractured community together. Systemic involvement of women's institutions in the water agenda, PRI & CBO collaboration and blending traditional knowledge with modern knowledge systems would be an important aspect to mobilize collective action in water.

Panelist: Mr. Avinash Alok, State Coordinator, GIZ

Mr Alok pointed out that data driven decision making is critical as far as participatory groundwater management is concerned. Since communities are to play a pivotal role in water governance and management, their access to relevant data along with capability to use them for decision making would be important. Which also brings us to the point of investment on building capacities and leadership capabilities of the communities.

Panelist: Mr. Vivek Bhatt, WALMI, Madhya Pradesh

Mr Bhatt added, among others, that the focus of the capacity building efforts for the communities has to be on unpacking the underlying science of groundwater, recharge and conservation.

Concluding Remarks from the Consultation

The consultation concluded with a consensus on the importance of:

1. Strengthening collaboration among researchers, civil society organizations (CSOs), government bodies, and local communities.
2. Enhancing grassroots leadership for sustainable natural resource management.
3. Continuing efforts to integrate scientific methods and community participation into groundwater management policies.
4. Implement insights from the consultation in upcoming policy frameworks and community-level interventions.
5. Promote continued dialogue and collaboration across stakeholders to address participatory groundwater management challenges.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Paoni Patidar, Saheb Bhattacharyya are with the Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) and Garima Taneja, Suchiradipta Bhattacharjee, Archisman Mitra and Tanmoy Bhaduri are affiliated with International Water Management Institute (IWMI).

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ANNEXURE: AGENDA OF THE WORKSHOP

09:30 - 10:00	Registration and Welcome Tea/Coffee
10:00 – 10:15	Welcome Remarks IWMI & PRADAN
10:15 – 10:35	Special Remarks Special Invitees from Madhya Pradesh State Employment Guarantee Council and SPMU Atal Bhujal Yojna
10:35 – 10:55	<i>Presentation on the study findings: Political Economy of Bottom-up Governance: Atal Bhujal Yojana & MGNREGS</i>
10:55 – 11:10	<i>Presentation on the study findings: Scientific tools for facilitating bottom-up decision-making in MGNREGS</i>
11:10 – 11:40	Facilitated discussion on the presentations
11:40 – 12:00	Tea Break
12:00 - 12:20	Presentation on the training module: Developing Water Champions – Observation from the field
12:20 – 13:00	Panel Discussion: <i>Capacity build need and potential strategies for strengthening grassroots governance and community leadership in the context of Atal Bhujal Yojna</i>
13:00 – 13: 30	Q & A for the panel discussion and presentation
13:30 – 13:35	Concluding remarks by IWMI
13:35 – 13:40	Vote of Thanks by PRADAN
13:40 onwards	Networking Lunch