



# Megh Pyne Abhiyan

## Clouds' Water Campaign





**Megh Pyne Abhiyan (MPA)**, literally clouds' Water Campaign, is at the same time a **campaign**, involving people around the issue of water and livelihood, and a **functional network** of grassroots organizations. The campaign is spread across five districts of North Bihar - Supaul, Saharsa, Khagaria, Madhubani and West Champaran, by five **grassroots organizations**, Gramyasheel, Kosi Seva Sadan, Samta, Ghoghardiha Prakhand Swarajya Vikas Sangh and SAVERA, employing 47 local development associates and 5 program coordinators, under the guidance of two social development professionals. MPA's initiatives are fully supported by **Arghyam**, a public charitable foundation focused on water and sanitation sector in India since 2005. Arghyam works closely with MPA in terms of highlighting the issue of safe drinking water in north Bihar and extending technical and conceptual support for strengthening the campaign.

MPA has been active since 2006 in **Bihar**, a state located in the eastern part of India, whose northern part is the playfield of eight major rivers. In north Bihar **flood** is a recurrent phenomenon that, on an annual basis, destroys thousands of human lives, apart from livestock and assets worth millions, but continues to remain one of the worst managed human-induced disaster. The issue of flood in north Bihar has wide-ranging and multiple consequences with direct and indirect impact on various aspects of people's life, in particular

- Inaccessibility to **safe drinking water** and sanitation facilities



- Health problems, particularly **water borne diseases**
- Collapse of agriculture, restricted **livelihood** opportunities and rampant migration
- Disruption of individual, family and community life

The **water** issue in this context can be briefly articulated as

- Inability to access **safe drinking water during floods**, resulting in a myriad of health problems
- **Groundwater contamination** (physical, chemical, and biological)
- Disregarded water quality issue and almost **forgotten practices** of managing clean drinking water at the community level
- Lack of **hygiene and sanitation** facilities
- Irrigation problems correlated with **agricultural and land-related social practices**

## Mission and Approach

MPA works for a **sustainable, equitable and contextual water management** system that combines appropriate



technological innovations and adaptation of conventional wisdom.

However, much beyond that, the wider mandate is to stimulate **collective action and accountability** towards a 'common good' amongst the local habitants, through

- Developing community based practices for challenging the present trend of dependence on external relief and proposing an alternative approach of **self management**
- Instigating a behavioural change of rural communities with regards to common property resources and institutions, promoting **self reliance** as an attitude towards local problems.
- Building a **critical mass** of human resources for dealing with the local problems and facilitating their understanding of water related issues.
- Adopting the **pace and understanding of the community** instead of expecting the community to cope with programme constraints



MPA's water management practices are

- **Simple, cheap**, doable by everyone **irrespective of caste, gender, class, economic positions, social power**
- Environmentally **sustainable**, culturally compatible and **socially equitable**
- Following the **do-it-yourself** principle, requiring only **locally available material**, without external input
- Promoted both at community and household levels, in order to encourage **collective responsibility and action** and have a positive impact on people's **habits and well being**
- Strengthened with several activities creating **awareness on water quality** and promoting **hygienic environment**

- Supporting the community to undertake **dug well revival** as a community effort and enterprise, irrespective of any private ownership, and facilitating the transmission of knowledge about dug well as a source of drinking water
- Encourage the **social movement around water**, and sensitize people on the issue of pure drinking water through marches, meetings at various levels, festivals, alternative media interaction, educational programs
- **Advocacy** at grassroots, district and state levels with regard to water and land, integrating civil society representatives, block level officials, politicians, district level department head, senior and eminent citizens, media



- **Flexible practices, contextual** to the ecological region, developed through prolonged social research, continuously adjustable and modifiable by the people on the basis of the **micro socio-environmental situation**.

## Main Activities

- Temporary **rainwater harvesting** (safe collection and storage), through an innovative technique that is particularly appropriate during floods (serves also as a shelter and does not require further filtration), and can be innovated by people
- Promoting locally available **techniques of filtering and purifying** contaminated water for drinking purposes
- Carrying out scientific **water testing** in the villages by trained local social workers, compiling and disseminating comprehensive data

- **Building capacities of organization partners and field staff** with regard to water management, social development processes and organizational culture (accountability, program documentation, financial management)
- Carrying on **anthropological research** on community based water management, ecological history, flood coping mechanism practices, social movements around water, social impact of knowledge and technology. The continual ethnographic effort is integrated in all the phases of the project cycle
- Propagating innovative and contextually appropriate **agricultural methodologies** (in relation with flood, land tenure and irrigation facilities) for creating food sufficiency (SRI/Shri Vidhi)
- Exploring **alternative approaches** to flood **relief** in terms of nature, proportion, and priorities of resources deployed.



The campaign is working towards a **flexible package of practices**, involving the following activities currently at the pilot phase

- Design and promotion of **innovative techniques of rainwater storage**, as well as **collective purification systems**
- Compilation and propagation of **groundwater profile** of each campaign districts
- Revival and construction of innovative **cost effective dug wells**, exploring new strategies for keeping the dug well water safe and secure, promoting its use in arsenic prone areas, and collaborating with the government on dug well revival.
- **Revival of surface water bodies**, as community based development initiatives
- Develop a social, economic and technical argument and modus operandi for the **drainage of water logged areas**
- Explore collective **irrigation systems** in the flood prone areas for facilitating agriculture amongst the small and marginal farmers
- Developing and popularizing **contextual agricultural practices** in flood affected areas, sandy soils, low lying and waterlogged areas, for local food production on a sustainable and equitable basis
- Designing **ecological sanitation** for flood prone areas and spreading its usage possibly in collaboration with the government
- Promoting **adaptive everyday practices** to cope with challenging situation in terms of **health, sanitation, food-intake, personal and environmental hygiene**

## Way Forward

- Enhance sustainable knowledge in the context of local reality and build social capital to ensure an effective response to people's needs and livelihood requirements
- Establish an alternative development model of self governance in an area where the development processes are being manipulated and controlled by short term relief and rehabilitation measures
- Consolidate the community mobilization around water issues and facilitate collective action to address common problems and concerns



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