

Soon, 24/7 water for 10,000 naxal-hit villages

RURAL CAUSE Three ministries join hands to implement India's most ambitious solar-powered drinking water project

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NEW DELHI: A government initiative to extend round-the-clock water supply to one-fifth of the villages in 78 naxal-hit districts, courtesy solar energy, is all set to turn them into every metropolitan city's envy.

The Union ministries of finance, new and renewable energy, and drinking water and sanitation have come together to ensure that clean drinking water is supplied to 10,000 naxal-hit villages on a 24/7 basis under the Integrated Action

Plan of the central government. The lives of villagers in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district have already witnessed a sea change due to the installation of a solar energy-based dual pump piped water supply system.

A one horsepower submersible pump, energised by solar energy, has been installed in existing high-yielding bore wells and the pumped water is stored in 5,000-litre tanks. Water is then supplied to about 250 homes in each village.

The project cost for each village is low (about ₹5 lakh) because the system is run through solar energy, as opposed to electricity. Moreover,



Illustration: JAYANTO

the system is non-polluting in nature.

Sporred by the success of the project in Gadchiroli, the government is planning to replicate

the system in at least 10,000 villages - at a cost of ₹500 crore. Villages with a population between 150-250 have been chosen, considering that the system can cater to a maximum of 250 people per day. The remoteness of the villages, spread across nine states, was also taken into consideration.

In the collaborative effort, the ministry of new and renewable energy would provide subsidies at the rate of ₹70 per watt to install solar water pumping systems, and the finance ministry's Clean Energy Development Fund could pay part of the budget - ₹229 crore. The rest of the expenditure would be borne by the drinking water ministry.

"Once the National Clean Energy Fund clears the project, we will seek cabinet approval for its implementation," a senior government official said. The Centre believes these villages can get the regular water supply system within 18 months of gaining approval, and implementation of the scheme will be entrusted with the state governments. Villagers can run and maintain the hassle-free system for five years, making it India's biggest solar energy driven water project.

Despite the Centre spending crores to bridge the development deficit in naxal-hit areas, provision of drinking water continues to be a major concern.