

Megh Pyne Jeevika

Community led innovations for safe drinking water

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Megh Pyne Jeevika (MPJ) is an idea with moorings in a successful 'safe' drinking water initiative in north Bihar called the Megh Pyne Abhiyan (MPA). The extent of 'community receptiveness' created by MPA was made explicit during workshops conducted by Newcastle University Business School (NUBS) at MPA sites. It was apparent that the target rural community is 'willing and able' to take forward the innovations that emerged from MPA. These innovations are in the form of structures that collect, filter and store water- all made using local materials. Megh Pyne Jeevika is about income generation through micro-enterprises that leverage these innovations and this raring to go critical mass in the community.

The initiative will help tie the safe drinking water mandate into the social and economic fabric of the target rural community. The venture is likely to cover five districts in north Bihar, 10 panchayats across which will be the initial core clusters. Direct income and capacity building benefits to 1250 individuals, drinking water related health benefits to 100,000 people and; a progressive multiplier that comes with sustainability, will be highlights of the outcomes envisaged in four years from initiation. Seed support required is of 27 million rupees over three years before the enterprise starts generating true ('seed' grant free) surpluses. It is important to note that this input is performance contingent and over three years. The model can be scaled down to reduce the grant input that is required to initiate MPJ. However, given the scope of MPA activities it will be useful to have inclusiveness at this level i.e. 10 panchayats.

This venture will be run jointly by MPA and NUBS. The sponsors for this venture will be elicited through the 'winners' bootcamp' at the iDiya social innovation challenge. Sponsors who come onboard for returns to their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mandate or rather, the generation next of CSR, for 'investments in social equity', will also get upfront value. This will be by a potential modification in 'MPJ' label to reflect the sponsors' contribution. Furthermore, a negotiated manner and extent of direct involvement of sponsors in design and implementation will also be acceptable and welcome.

The impact of MPA over the last few years is particularly highlighted in the drastic reduction in infant mortality rates in the aforementioned rural clusters. The achievements of MPA have been important in making MPJ a reality worth pitching for. Thus the MPA will also be crucially and rightly supported in due course by the MPJ venture. We are confident that all will agree with the fact that MPJ is means to an end, and matters much because it will keep something alive and 'literally' so -whether this is seen in the form of lives, livelihood or the broader 'sensitization for sustainability' that is spoken of in so many ways and words -albeit, rural communities, drinking water and health are right at the heart of most of the dialogue.

Eklavya Prasad: Development practitioner with over 13 years of experience mostly in Rajasthan and Bihar. Founder of the successful Megh Pyne Abhiyan across five districts in Bihar. Work with Centre for Science and Environment, and Seva Mandir. Educational background includes a masters programme from Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)

Dr. Pushkar Jha :Academic in Strategy at Newcastle University Business School. Has worked on 'project based learning' frameworks, and has carried out project design initiatives in association with international donor agencies, in the area of rural and micro-enterprise development. Holds a post graduate diploma in rural

management from Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA), MPhil in data modeling, and a PhD in strategy from Cass Business School, London.

S Vishwanth: A water activist working in urban and rural context. Also known for his innovation in the area of rainwater harvesting, ecological sanitation and waste water management. He was leading Rainwater Club and presently is a partner in Biome Environmental Solutions Pvt Ltd.

Dr Himanshu Kulkarni: A hydro-geologist with an extremely strong social orientation heading a Pune based organization - ACWADAM. He works across different ecological zones of India and is a strong proponent of groundwater profiling for identifying appropriate drinking water practices. He and his team are working on developing decentralized and alternative drinking water framework for flood prone and arsenic affected areas of north Bihar.