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Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari: Community Water Conservation in Korea District, Chhattisgarh

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ENVIRONMENT

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Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari: Community Water Conservation in Korea District, Chhattisgarh

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WHY IN NEWS

The **Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari** initiative in **Korea district, Chhattisgarh** is emerging as a replicable model of community-led water conservation. Without any dedicated government budget for water structures, 1,260+ farmers voluntarily allocated their land for rainwater harvesting — restoring natural springs in 17 tribal hamlets, raising groundwater by 3–4 metres, and reducing seasonal distress migration by an estimated 25%.

KOREA DISTRICT — CONTEXT

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Location	Northern Chhattisgarh, bordering MP and UP
Tribal population	~60% of total population (Scheduled Tribes)
Economic profile	Predominantly tribal, backward; dependent on rain-fed agriculture
Primary challenge	Water scarcity → seasonal distress migration to cities for labour
Forest cover	High — part of central Indian tribal belt
Governance	PESA area — tribal self-governance provisions applicable

THE JAL SANCHAY JAN BHAGIDARI MODEL

Core Approach

Unlike top-down government water schemes, this initiative is **entirely community-driven**:

- No separate budget allocated for water structures
- **Voluntary land allocation** by farmers for soak pits and rainwater harvesting structures
- Traditional knowledge of water conservation integrated with modern watershed science
- Community takes ownership of maintenance — structures don't fall into disrepair after construction

Scale of Impact

INDICATOR	ACHIEVEMENT
Farmers participating	1,260+
Soak pits constructed	2,000+
Traditional ponds revived	440
Groundwater rise	3–4 metres
Natural springs restored	17 tribal hamlets
Seasonal distress migration reduction	~25%

COMMUNITY ROLES — SOCIAL ARCHITECTURE

Two innovative community roles drive the programme:

ROLE	DESCRIPTION
Neer Nayikas (“Water Queens”)	Women volunteers who manage local water monitoring, awareness, and mobilisation at village level
Jal Doots (“Water Messengers”)	Youth ambassadors who conduct household-level outreach, maintain records of water structures, and liaise with panchayat

Why women leadership matters here:

- Women are primary collectors of water in rural/tribal households — they understand water scarcity most acutely
- Female participation increases community buy-in and long-term maintenance commitment
- Aligns with NRLM-SHG framework already active in Chhattisgarh

TRADITIONAL WATER HARVESTING SYSTEMS — BEING REVIVED

STRUCTURE	REGION	DESCRIPTION
Johad	Rajasthan, Haryana	Earthen check dam for rainwater collection
Baoli / Vav	Rajasthan, Gujarat	Stepwell — combines water storage + community space
Kund	Rajasthan	Underground cistern for rainwater
Talab / Pond	Central India	Traditional village pond — multipurpose
Ahar-Pyne	Bihar	Irrigation tank + canal system
Zabo	Nagaland	Terraced water harvesting combining forest + agriculture

In Korea district, **talabs (ponds)** are the primary traditional structure being revived — 440 such ponds have been restored.

GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK — PESA AND TRIBAL WATER RIGHTS

PESA Act, 1996 (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas)

Korea district falls under **Fifth Schedule areas** where PESA applies:

- Gram Sabha has powers over natural resources including minor water bodies
- PESA empowers tribal gram sabhas to regulate use of water, land, and forest in their area
- Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari works *through* gram sabhas — not around them — making it constitutionally grounded

Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 and Water

Community Forest Rights (CFR) under FRA include rights over water sources within community forests — linking tribal water conservation directly to legal entitlements.

CONVERGENCE WITH NATIONAL WATER PROGRAMMES

PROGRAMME	CONNECTION TO KOREA MODEL
Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)	Provides piped tap water supply (Har Ghar Jal) — the Korea model ensures groundwater availability to sustain JJM's source sustainability
Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABY)	Groundwater management scheme — Korea's groundwater rise (3–4 m) is exactly the ABY outcome sought
MGNREGA	Watershed works, pond de-silting, earthen bunds are permissible works — community's volunteer structures could be formalised under MGNREGA
PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana	Water use efficiency — revived ponds can feed micro-irrigation systems

CLIMATE RESILIENCE ANGLE

Irregular and erratic monsoon is the **new normal** for central India under climate change:

- **Shorter, intense rainfall events** → rapid runoff → groundwater not recharged
- **Longer dry spells** → agriculture fails → distress migration
- **Community water storage** (soak pits, revived ponds) acts as a buffer — stores peak monsoon water for dry season use

The Korea model is fundamentally a **community-based adaptation (CBA)** strategy — low-cost, locally managed, and resilient because it does not depend on external infrastructure that can fail.

SCALING POTENTIAL

- Model is being studied for replication in other **Chhattisgarh districts** — particularly Korba, Surguja, Jashpur (similar tribal-dominated, water-stressed profiles)
- Interest from **Madhya Pradesh** (tribal belt: Mandla, Dindori) and **Jharkhand** (Santhal Pargana)
- **Key replication requirements:** Strong gram sabha, active women's SHG network, local champion (sarpanch / NGO), and PESA-compatible governance

UPSC ANGLE

- **GS2 — Governance:** Participatory governance, decentralised water management, PESA, gram sabha powers, tribal self-governance.
- **GS2 — Social Justice:** Tribal welfare, reducing distress migration, women's empowerment (Neer Nayikas).
- **GS3 — Environment:** Traditional water harvesting, groundwater recharge, Atal Bhujal Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission.
- **GS3 — Disaster Management / Climate:** Community-based adaptation to climate change, water security.
- **Mains Q:** "Decentralised, community-led water conservation is more sustainable than large state-funded infrastructure. Discuss with examples."

Prelims-ready facts:

- Neer Nayikas: women water volunteers in Korea model
- Jal Doots: youth water ambassadors
- Groundwater rise: 3–4 metres
- Soak pits constructed: 2,000+ | Ponds revived: 440
- Korea district: ~60% ST population; PESA area
- PESA 1996: applicable to Fifth Schedule areas; gram sabha controls natural resources

FACTS CORNER

Initiative: Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari — Korea district, Chhattisgarh

Community model: Voluntary land allocation by 1,260+ farmers; zero separate government budget for water structures

Structures: 2,000+ soak pits constructed; 440 traditional ponds revived

Impact: Groundwater rise 3–4 m; 17 tribal hamlets got natural springs back; ~25% reduction in distress migration

Neer Nayikas: Women water volunteers | Jal Doots: Youth water ambassadors

Korea district: ~60% tribal population; PESA Fifth Schedule area

PESA 1996: Gram sabha controls minor water bodies and natural resources in tribal areas

Convergence: Jal Jeevan Mission (piped supply) + Atal Bhujal Yojana (groundwater) + MGNREGA (watershed works)

Traditional systems revived: Talabs (village ponds) — part of India's ancient water harvesting heritage

Climate link: Community water storage = community-based adaptation (CBA) to erratic monsoon under climate change



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