

Experts want state to go the science way to avoid drought

Radheshyam.Jadhav
@timesgroup.com

Pune: With the Indian monsoon under the shadow of the weather phenomenon known as El Niño, water experts want the state government to take scientific steps to avoid a severe drought this year.

Advanced Center for Water Resources Development and Management (ACWADAM), a state-based NGO that deals with climate change and its impacts on long-term replenishment of groundwater, has observed that the drought last year had attracted the attention of various donors from across the country who helped the Jal Yukta Shivar Programme to improve the situation in the state.

However, ACWADAM experts say that in their zeal to help, many interventions were more emotive than scientific and could have evoked a different response in terms of short- and long-term effectiveness.

Most of the relief efforts have been intuitive, without deep scientific thinking.

Experts want the state to undertake proper steps to tackle drought so that hasty steps like



File photo

ARID SITUATION

JYS could be avoided. "The government, with CSR support, is aiming to make Maharashtra drought-free over the next few years. The government must follow a trajectory different from the one it had followed during the last five years. Such a trajectory ought to be inclusive of all the good practices followed by many organisations, but with a definitive interdisciplinary approach that includes social, economic and ecological considerations in equal measure," said Himanshu Kulkarni of ACWADAM.

He added that a strong infusion of the science of hydrogeology and the concept of participatory groundwater manage-

ment in these models will only benefit all such interventions.

Amruta Pradhan, a researcher with South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP), said, "JYS is flagship programme of the government. But majority of JYS work has been done unscientifically and hence though we can see water as of now, not necessarily groundwater recharge has taken place. Soil conservation is the key to groundwater recharge and this was completely ignored in JSY". Pradhan added that the government must opt for a 'top to bottom' approach for watershed works to tackle drought.

The observations made by experts come against the backdrop of chief minister Devendra Fadnis flaunting the JYS as a successful model to tackle drought, especially in Marathwada region of the state. Maharashtra has faced vagaries of rainfall during the last 5-10 years.

Three of the last five years were drought years, with Marathwada being the worst affected. More than 2,000 farmers have committed suicides in the last 3 years in Marathwada alone as per the government of Maharashtra's records.