

# **“A fresh approach in Agriculture in India: Micro-irrigation”**

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India's current irrigation coverage of 48.7% of total sown area means two-quarters of the population engaged in farming are dependent on monsoon rainfall.

Micro-irrigation projects under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), critical to making India drought-proof and producing "more crop per drop", have steadily met targets since the launch of the scheme by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in 2015, according to a recent review.

An analysis of the mission by HT, however, shows only a handful of states account for the overall leap. PMKSY is aimed at boosting investment in irrigation and improving efficiency of water use. India's current irrigation coverage of 48.7% of total sown area means two-quarters of the population engaged in farming are dependent on monsoon rainfall, which often exacerbates agrarian distress even during a partial drought.

At the national level, coverage of micro-irrigation networks beat its target for 2015-16: 572,000 hectares against a target of 500,000 hectares. In 2016-17, the coverage was 839,000 hectares against a target of 800,000 hectares.

Partial data for 2017-18 shows the government "is on course to achieving or outdoing its target", agriculture secretary SK Pattanayak said. The target in 2017-18 was 1.2 million hectares and partial data from states showed that 926,432 hectares had been covered.

"The achievement (for 2017-18) is likely to enhance as compilation and reporting of works undertaken in the financial year are still being uploaded," the review report seen by HT states.

States haven't been able to make equal progress. All northeastern states have made zero progress. Unequal progress means meeting long-term goals can be challenging.

Just five states - Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu - account for 78% of the coverage expansion during 2017-18.

Among the laggards, Bihar was able to add just 86 hectares while Himachal Pradesh added 1,107 hectares. Punjab added 274 hectares. Top performer Andhra expanded micro-irrigation coverage in 186,444 hectares while Karnataka added 164,967 hectares. Gujarat stood third, bringing 143,134 hectares under the irrigation network.

One reason for some states lagging behind is that they were not able to release their share of funds, an official said, requesting anonymity. For centrally sponsored schemes like PMKSY, the Centre contributes 60% of funds while states have to provide 40%.

"One major reason for unequal uptake of central schemes is that some states aren't able to allocate their 40% share in state budgets. In irrigation, this delays the drawing up of state and district-level plans,

creating backlogs," said Ashok Lahiri, a former adviser to the erstwhile Planning Commission.

Out of a total 140.13 million hectares of sown area, India's net irrigated area is 68.38 million hectares while 71.74 million hectares are un-irrigated. To bridge this gap, the government launched the PMKSY in 2015-16 by combining ongoing schemes. Under the more crop per drop component of the PMKSY, small farmers get paid to the tune of 55% of cost of micro-irrigation systems; other farmers get 45% of the unit cost.

