



Jal Sakhi Yojana: Empowering Rural Women Through Water Stewardship

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The Jal Sakhi Yojana is a women-centered initiative designed to improve rural water management and support sustainable access to clean drinking water. The scheme trains local women, known as *Jal Sakhis*, to oversee water distribution, maintain supply records, assist in household tap connections, and promote water conservation practices within their communities. By integrating technical training with community engagement, the programme strengthens transparency and efficiency in local water governance. Additionally, it provides livelihood opportunities and enhances the social and economic empowerment of rural women.

Introduction

Water scarcity is one of the most pressing issues affecting rural India. To address this challenge and promote sustainable water management, several state governments have introduced community-based initiatives. One such impactful initiative is the Jal Sakhi Yojana, aimed at empowering rural women to manage, conserve, and distribute water resources efficiently. The scheme not only supports water conservation but also creates livelihood opportunities for women, making it a model of social and environmental progress. Overall, the Jal Sakhi Yojana plays a vital role in advancing the objectives of the Jal Jeevan Mission and fostering long-term water security in rural India.

What is Jal Sakhi Yojana?

The Jal Sakhi Yojana is a government-led programme that appoints trained women, known as "Jal Sakhis," to oversee water supply management in villages. These women are entrusted with responsibilities such as ensuring proper water distribution, maintaining water supply records, supporting household water connections, and promoting water-saving practices among villagers.

While the exact structure of the scheme may vary from state to state, the underlying goal remains the same: empowering women and improving rural water governance. The scheme not only improves the efficiency and transparency of rural water management but also provides employment and leadership opportunities for women, making them key contributors to the success of water-related programmes like the Jal Jeevan Mission.

Objectives of the Jal Sakhi Yojana

1. Promote women's participation in local water management.
2. Ensure reliable water supply in rural households.
3. Create employment opportunities for rural women, especially self-help group (SHG) members.
4. Encourage water conservation practices at the community level.
5. Improve transparency and accountability in water usage and distribution.
6. Strengthen local governance under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM).

Key Features of the Scheme

1. Selection of Jal Sakhis: Women from local self-help groups (SHGs) are selected and trained. Their familiarity with the community helps in effective communication and implementation.

2. Training and Capacity Building: Jal Sakhis receive training in:

- Meter reading
- Handling household water connections
- Water quality testing
- Basic plumbing skills
- Record maintenance

3. Income and Employment: Jal Sakhis earn income through:

- Meter reading charges
- Service fees for maintenance
- Honorarium or incentives provided under the scheme

This makes the scheme self-sustaining and financially empowering for women.

4. Community Awareness: Jal Sakhis conduct awareness drives on:

- Clean drinking water
- Rainwater harvesting
- Judicious water use
- Importance of hygiene and sanitation

Implementation and Impact

Improved Water Supply: Villages covered under the Jal Sakhi Yojana have shown improvements in water distribution, timely repairs, and reduced wastage.

Women's Empowerment: The scheme has helped women gain financial independence, technical skills, and leadership roles in village governance.

Strengthening Jal Jeevan Mission: By involving women at the grassroots level, the scheme supports the national goal of providing tap water to all rural households.

Behavioral Change in Communities: Through awareness campaigns, Jal Sakhis help villagers adopt water-efficient habits and support conservation activities.

Challenges

Though impactful, the scheme faces challenges such as:

- Need for continuous training and support
- Irregular payment of incentives in some areas
- Lack of technical resources in remote villages
- Social barriers restricting women's leadership roles

Addressing these issues can further strengthen the initiative.

Conclusion

The Jal Sakhi Yojana represents a powerful combination of women empowerment and sustainable water management. By placing women at the heart of rural water governance, the scheme ensures better transparency, improved water access, and greater community participation. As the programme expands, it can serve as a transformative model for other regions, contributing to a water-secure and socially empowered rural India.