

Schoolboy takes up project to green deserts

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

ADHI DAIV, a Class 11 student of Shri Ram School at Moulasari, Gurugram, is running a crowdfunding campaign, Project Urvara, which aims to plant trees in deserts, starting with the arid regions of Sikar district, Rajasthan, to eradicate the problems of water scarcity and agriculture in the state.

"I did extensive research two years ago to find plausible solutions to tackle problems of water scarcity and agriculture in deserts. I interacted with environmentalist Sundaram Verma, a Padma Shri awardee, who taught me about growing plants with the 'one-litre water technique' he had put in practice," says Adhi.

He adds that attending various environment-driven workshops, such as those organised by Paani Foundation, made him understand that deforestation was the root cause of water scarcity in states like Rajasthan. "I started with this project in my ancestral village in Rajasthan during the lockdown last year, and have been work-

ing to facilitate hassle-free water at the doorsteps of women residing in arid regions," he says.

How does the one-litre water technique work? "The process requires 30 centimetres of deep soil ploughing that has to be done five days before the beginning and just after the conclusion of the monsoon. Through this process, moisture of the soil can be absorbed by eliminating weeds and controlling capillary action in the upper soil surface that allows recharging of aquifers." The entire agriculture procedure could be completed in three months with the help of a tractor or might take a little longer if done manually.

This dryland agroforestry method of plantation underlines the three pillars of sustainability -- the economy, society and environment. "Our environment-friendly project will generate employment, especially for women in villages,

as they can grow and sell fruits and vegetables grown in their yards," Adhi says, adding that green fodder obtained as a by-product could be used for feeding animals, and raw materials extracted from trees could be used by artisans and small-scale industries to manufacture toys.

The 15-year old wishes to share this water conservation technique with governments of other states as well. "As this technique can be practiced only during the monsoon, we plan to use the remaining months to raise awareness about this farming process with other governments," he says.

Sikar is an arid district located between Agra and the Thar desert of Rajasthan and receives less than 400mm annual rainfall.

"We are approaching a few Government Girls Schools in Sikar and teaching the girls to use the technique to plant trees on barren lands," says Adhi.

They are also planting fruits and vegetables in schools, that are served in midday meals.

They have also planted trees in gaushalas that are usually built in arid lands, and hope to feed green fodder to cows. He complains that the government of Rajasthan has been providing only dry grass instead of green grass to gaushalas.

"We have planted around 2,200 trees on 11 acres of arid region in Sikar, using Rs 3.36 lakh generated. This money includes Rs 1,50,900 raised through 'Fuel A Dream' fundraising campaign," he says.

The Science enthusiast did a similar ecological campaign in 2019 that raised around Rs 62,000 and helped more than 20 women of Alwar district in Rajasthan, by providing them with free waterwheels for their daily needs.

Project Urvara hopes to convert barren deserts and wastelands of Nagaur, Jodhpur, Hanumangarh, Sriganganagar, Churu, and Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan and other cities in North India into green lands soon.

