Villagers succeed where govt fails

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JAIPUR, March 8. — The villagers of the Shekhawati region, one of the most drought-prone areas in the state, have offered a unique solution to the state government as well as the Union Planning Commission to make their state drought-free.

Their proposal requires no government funds but a logical channelling of waste water from the canals in Rajasthan during the monsoon.

The villages of three districts, Seekar, Churu and Jhunjhunu, in association an NGO, the GDS Rural Research Foundation, have come up with an answer which they claim would solve all their problems.

The solution is simple. Since Punjab and Haryana experience adequate rain during the monsoons, there is enough surplus water in all the canals entering Rajasthan.

“Now what we want is to divert this water during June, July and August to the Shekhawati region so that we could provide our kharif crops with water. This logical diversion would change our entire life style”, the convenor of the foundation, Mr Mukesh Gupta said.

The villagers do not want two irrigated crops in their area. Instead they prefer engaging in animal husbandry and the cottage industry to supplement their earning.

Over 100 panchayats and 25,000 farmers of the region have agreed in principle and are planning to project it as a major issue for the Assembly elections due in December this year.

“We are consulting 400 more panchayats in these three districts. In a month or two all the panchayats of these districts would pass a resolution for this project and would decide to vote for the party that would support and implement their demand”, Mr Gupta said.

As regards monetary assistance, the farmers have given a model that hardly requires any money from the state or from the Centre. As far as land requirements are concerned, the villagers unanimously agreed to a part of their land for the project.

“As per our project, we have to acquire 25,000 hectares of land for digging canals that would water around 10 lakh hectares of land. It comes to 2.5 per cent of the irrigated land so every farmer benefiting from the scheme will have to donate 2.5 per cent of his land to the canal project.

The foundation has proposed to issue bonds offering a reasonable rate of interest.

The villagers do not want pucca constructions. Therefore, the digging cost of the canal would be 10 per cent less than the usual costs.

If this “for the people, by the people scheme is approved by the state and the Centre, it would be first of its kind to have got underway without the government playing any role in it.”