

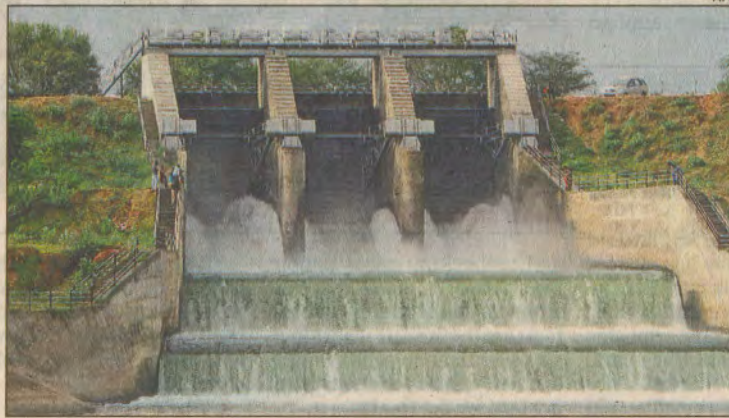
Narmada network has eased water scarcity conditions: Study

SSNNL-Sponsored Survey Flies In The Face Of State Govt's Claims Of Drought

Rajiv Shah | TNN

Gandhinagar: A just-published study, sponsored by Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Ltd (SSNNL), suggests that even the existing incomplete canal network should have considerably eased the current scarcity conditions, claimed to be prevailing in large parts of Gujarat. The study acquires significance, as it comes almost about the same time when the Gujarat government regarded "lack of rains" as the chief criterion to declare 91 out of 225 talukas as "scarcity hit". Based on the same, the state has demanded Rs 18,000 crore from the Centre as drought relief.

Prepared by the prestigious Hyderabad-based Institute for Resource Analysis and Policy (IRAP), the study, which covers half of Gujarat, says that in areas where the canal waters have reached, the rainfed factor has almost completely vanished. It says, "In both gravity irrigation areas (where canal networking is complete and Narmada waters reach the fields) and canal lift irrigated areas (where farmers siphon out Narmada water by sinking diesel pumps), the rainfed crops have been replaced by their irrigat-



Enough drinking water for the next two years, says the report

ed counterparts."

Already, voices can be heard in government Sachivalaya that even in the 91 talukas declared as "scarcity hit" — the talukas of only five districts Kutch, Amreli, Junagadh, Porbandar and Jamnagar — the situation can be called "serious", as there are no Narmada irrigation waters here. "Even in these districts, Narmada-based drinking water is not a problem. With the Narmada dam brimming and more waters coming in from the up-

stream, there is a huge possibility of storing enough drinking water for the next two years," a senior bureaucrat told TOI, citing the study.

The study claims, "In rural and urban Bhuj and Jamnagar, there has been a marked change in water sources after the introduction of Narmada canal based water supplies. In Jamnagar, the rural communities started using only single source (Narmada) of drinking and cooking, domestic uses and livestock drinking. They used to de-

pend on public borewells and common stand posts earlier."

As for irrigation, the official insists, things have "eased" in three main districts of Saurashtra — Rajkot, Bhavnagar and Surendranagar — whose talukas were declared scarcity hit by using the rainfed criterion. "People are lifting waters from the Narmada branch canal in areas close to Morbi and Malia in Rajkot; in Vallabhipur region in Bhavnagar; and Limdi, Mudi, Halwad, Lakhtar and Dhrangadhra in Surendranagar," the official said, adding, "One can find a similar situation in north Gujarat's Patan, Chanasma, Harij and Radhanpur areas."

The study says that the gross cropped area per farmer has gone up drastically in areas where Narmada water has reached. In Ahmedabad district, for instance, farmers lift waters straight from the canal, and here the gross cropped area is up from 5.28 hectares (ha) to a whopping 17.28 ha per farmer. Here, as well as, in other locations, "well irrigation has become a thing of the past", and farmers have gone in for "remunerative crops" like paddy, cotton, castor, chick pea, wheat and maize.