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Banking on tanks**Reclaiming traditional tanks may help tide over troubled waters**

In Jhanjharpur, Bihar, the Samajik Shaikshanik Vikas Kendra (SSVK), a non-governmental organisation founded by Deepak Bharti, a follower of Jaiprakash Narayan, is reclaiming traditional tanks to be used for fishery development. In these 525 villages spreading over the districts of Madhubani, Saharsa, Darbhanga and Supour, fisheries has become the new idiom of sustainable natural resources use.

"These massive ponds were either used by the zamindaars or were derelict. So why should people die when they have resources right in front of them?" says Bharti. The organisation has already reclaimed 50 tanks. The process is simple: they have members in all these districts search for such structures. Tanks are reclaimed only after the local residents agree.

Once the tank is made suitable for fishery purposes, block level fishing cooperatives are formed to manage it. Members of the cooperative start a small saving scheme to fund the fisheries in the tank. The village's residents share the earnings from the tank and a part is used for the development of the village. "The ponds can bring about a change to the distraught fisherfolk of the state," says Ranjeev, an environmental activist currently with Action Aid, Patna.

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