

This project in Bihar promises drinking water at 50 paise a litre

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A new project in Bihar aims to provide drinking water at half-a rupee a litre
[Representational image]Creative Commons

An innovative approach is underway in Darbhanga district of Bihar to make contaminated water potable -- with the active participation of private players in coordination with state agencies. The region faces an acute water shortage during summers. The drinking water is also affected by arsenic contamination in the [falling groundwater table](#).

Branded "Sulabh Jal", the ambitious project began on Saturday from a small pond here with the use of French technology aiming at the purification of contaminated water and making it safe drinking water at only 50 paise per litre.

"This is the first time in the world that we have succeeded in producing pure drinking water at a very nominal cost by this new technology and villagers may get direct benefits," Sulabh International founder Bindeshwari Pathak said while laying the foundation of the project at Haribol Pond in the presence of Darbhanga MLA Sanjay Saraogi and District Magistrate Chandrasekhar Prasad Singh.

The pilot project, to be implemented in coordination with civic authorities, will later be replicated in other parts of the state. The project aims to provide the cheapest drinking water using the innovative model of purification at various stages from any water bodies like rivers or ponds, Pathak said.

The experiment was started earlier by Sulabh, which had introduced "Sulabh Jal" in arsenic prone villages of the three districts of North 24 Parganas, Murshidabad and Nadia in West Bengal. It had been jointly established three years ago by Sulabh along with the French organisation and trial run proved successful.



A potter transports earthen pots on his bicycle to sell in a market on a hot day. These pots are mainly used in summers to keep drinking water cold. Reuters

The new water purification process can produce 8,000 litres of potable water per day at a nominal cost.

"It will be made available at 50 paise on a charity basis. Sulabh will install plants on the banks of Haribol tank here which would be operated on a no-profit basis. It would be managed by the self-help group (SHG) of the Darbhanga Nagar Nigam," Pathak added.

The installation cost of the machine comes to Rs 20 lakh, which was shared between the French organisation, Sulabh and the villagers.

The local people and NGOs will maintain the facility. It is a self-sustainable cost-effective project with active participation from the community and will generate employment, Pathak said.

The groundwater in many districts of northern Bihar bordering Nepal is estimated to have been severely affected by arsenic and other chemical contamination.

According to WHO, drinking arsenic-rich water over a long period results in various health hazards, including skin problems, skin cancer, cancer of the bladder, kidney and lungs, besides other diseases.