

HUL boost for water conservation

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Depleting water tables in the country have got corporates like Hindustan Unilever (HUL) worried. After all, products like soaps and detergents require this critical commodity to spur consumption. The maker of Lifebuoy soap and Surf Excel detergent said it will invest Rs 5 crore this year in water conservation projects.

This is part of a commitment to invest Rs 20 crore in this direction. However, this investment will go up substantially with HUL's move to launch India Water Body, an initiative to address the challenge of water scarcity in India in a more holistic manner.

The CEO and managing director of India's largest fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) firm, Nitin Paranjpe, told reporters at the launch of India Water Body that although a corpus has not yet been set aside for the foundation, the objective is to drive water security in the country by 2030 through the pub-

lic private partnership route.

"It is estimated that by 2030, the supply of water in India would be half of the demand for it. This is a crisis that has the potential to derail the economic and social development of the country and impact the health and livelihoods of millions of people across the country. We believe that what concerns the nation must concern us too," said Paranjpe. Consider the statistics which appear to be alarming. The current demand for water is a little over 700 trillion litre, according to data collated by the Water Resources Group.

This is expected to treble to 1,500 trillion litre by 2030. The gap in demand-supply will be 755 trillion litre by 2030. Demand is clearly outstripping supply. Surely for HUL, which draws 44% of its Rs 20,000 crore revenues from soaps and detergents, there are reasons to be concerned.

Take the example of Punjab, the food bowl of India. With growing consumption, water levels in Punjab have

declined to 600 feet from 250 feet in five years. These facts have led experts to believe that in the next two decades, there could be a serious crisis on water.

HUL has initiated projects in several states in India to create capacity towards conserving more than 50 billion litre of water by 2015. "Water is the life blood of our business. What we've seen in Punjab is an exponential drop in water levels," said Gopal Vittal, executive director (home and personal care business), HUL, while adding how growing prosperity is leading to a rise in consumption of eggs, meats and cereals, which requires more water when compared to other grains and vegetables down the value chain.

HUL is also working on how innovation can be brought about in the product pipeline. HUL has consistently reduced water consumption in its operations and developed product innovations such as Surf Excel quick-wash that helps consumers use less water while washing clothes.