Measures to Conserve Groundwater - Punjab Model

What is the issue?

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- In India groundwater is rapidly getting depleted due to various reasons.
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- Union and State governments are taking various measures in this regard.
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What is the status of groundwater depletion in India?

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- Central Ground Water Board (CWGB) has conducted a study on Rapidly-depleting groundwater in 6584 blocks across the country.
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- The CWGB assessment shows that groundwater in 1,034 of 6,584 blocks were over-exploited.
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- More water was being drawn out annually than was being recharged.
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- Further 934 blocks suffered from different stages of groundwater depletion.
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- Tamil Nadu had the most number of over-exploited blocks but Punjab was the worst in percentage terms with over 75% of its assessed blocks falling in the over-exploited category.
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- Other worst affected states were Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi.
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What are the measures taken by the union government?

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- Government of India has planned to implement a Water Conservation scheme

Atal Bhoojal Yojana, with a fund of Rs.6,000 crores.
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- Under this scheme, ground water will be recharge and hence it will provide sufficient water for the use of agriculture purposes.
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- This scheme will also revive the water bodies like rivers so that the level of ground water can be increased especially in the rural areas.
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- The fund for this project will be raised by the Ministry of Finance and the World Bank.
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What are the measures taken by Punjab government?

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- Punjab governments initially nudged the state's farmers into increasing paddy acreage by providing nearly-free electricity for pumping out groundwater and backing intensive MSP-driven procurement of paddy harvest.
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- Now the Punjab state government is looking at steps to reduce the cultivation of water-intensive paddy.
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- Recently the government has launched a pilot project in three villages under which digital meters will be installed on tube wells belonging to nearly 1,000 farmers in the three villages.
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- Instead of compensating the state discoms for free power supply, the state will deposit certain amount of money in the accounts of the farmers.
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- The farmers will be billed directly by the Discom on the basis of actual consumption.
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- The state has entered into an agreement with experts from the World Bank, Punjab Agricultural University and various state departments.
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- These agencies will estimate the actual power use by farmers and how it might change following the direct benefits transfer (DBT).
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- If the actual costs for farmers surpass the DBT amount, it is possible that farmers might rethink their paddy preference.
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Source: Business Line

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