

Experts call for ensuring sustainable management of vital groundwater resources in Nepal

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KATHMANDU, March 20: The 12th annual Groundwater Symposium titled "Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development and Management of Groundwater" successfully concluded in the capital on Monday, highlighting the need for ensuring sustainable management of Nepal's vital groundwater resources.

The symposium organized by the Center of Research for Environment, Energy, and Water (CREEW), The Small Earth Nepal (SEN), and the Kathmandu Valley Water Supply Management Board (KVSWMB), along with twenty-two national and international partners, cemented its place as a crucial regional platform for addressing groundwater sustainability.

Opening the symposium, Dr Saurav KC, deputy executive of CREEW, emphasized the event's evolution into a pivotal regional platform for groundwater experts since its inception in 2009. The keynote address by Dr Kriangsak Pirarai, from Thailand's Department of Groundwater Resources, underscored the importance of innovative approaches and proper regulation in groundwater management, sharing insights from Thailand's experience.

Addressing the symposium as Chief Guest, Secretary at the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation, Er Sushil Chandra Tiwari highlighted the government's commitment to groundwater sustainability and the formulation of new policies and plans to address the challenges head-on.

Dr Dhundi Raj Pathak, president of CREEW, pointed out the symposium's role in documenting valuable scientific knowledge on groundwater, aiming to aid in the development of actionable plans for sustainable groundwater management.

The event featured several insightful sessions, including discussions on groundwater governance in Southeast Asia, climate change impacts, and the intersection of climate, agriculture, and groundwater management. A highlight was the high-level panel discussion on inclusive groundwater development and management, moderated by Dr Bishnu Prasad Pandey. Panelists debated strategies to overcome barriers and promote sustainable practices, focusing on the importance of inclusivity, comprehensive databases, and the role of community-centric designs in groundwater projects.

Country Director of Oxfam in Nepal, Tripti Rai underscored the need to understand power dynamics and decision-making processes to tackle exclusions based on geography, caste, ethnicity, and gender. The discussion also touched on the essential role of academic institutions and the need for a singular authority for groundwater policy and management.

The symposium called for a coherent institutional and policy framework, stressing stakeholder engagement and community involvement in sustainable groundwater management practices. Dr Rabin Malla, executive director of CREEW, expressed optimism for future editions of the symposium to build upon these efforts towards ensuring the sustainability of groundwater resources for the generations to come.

With approximately 200 participants, including 150 in person and 50 virtually, and a notable female participation rate of 48 percent, the symposium showcased its commitment to inclusivity and diversity. The event not only facilitated a rich exchange of knowledge and best practices but also highlighted the urgent need for integrated and inclusive approaches to groundwater management in Nepal and beyond.