

THE BOUNTIFUL CHECK DAMS

“Water mother of India”, as she is popularly called, Amla Ruia, a social activist has been an instrumental force in transforming water scenario in rural areas of India, especially arid regions in and around Rajasthan. Her organization, Aakar Charitable Trust has built more than 375 check dams in more than 520 villages in water scarce areas of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Haryana. The efforts taken up by her initiative have made farmers self-reliant enabling them to grow multiple crops and venture into animal husbandry. Her work has impacted more than 2 lakh villagers, and has helped them generate over 500 crore rupees per annum. She has also been involved in other social causes such as women empowerment and education for girls and poor. Ruia was awarded Lakshmi Pat Singhania- IIM Lucknow National leadership award in 2011 and the India Eye Human Rights Observer Achievement Award in 2018. Her work has been covered by several media houses including BBC. In 2019, Ruia also appeared in a special episode of popular Indian quiz-based game show Kaun Banega Crorepati.

In her talk at TEDx Bits Pilani, Ruia begins by recounting the beginning of her journey during the famines in the late 1990s. Perturbed by the complexity of the situation, she was determined to find a solution. She began her work in the Pali region of Rajasthan, which did not receive any rain that year. As the talk continues, she tells that the groundwater levels had fallen really low and women had to carry heavy pots to fetch water over a long distance. Her organisation came up with an idea to build check dams. She goes on to tell about the first check dam which her trust built in 2006 in a village in Jhunjhunu district of Rajasthan which positively transformed the lives of villagers. The trust bears 70% cost check dams while the rest is borne by villagers, this partnership not only makes villagers feel proud but also self-reliant. Moving ahead she talks about other projects taken by her trust and what villagers feel about it. She talks about struggles faced by farmers and how her trust has helped them overcome those situations and how farmers have supported them in this initiative. In the end she talks about encompassing and boundlessness of water with her poetic couplets adding a touch of philosophy to the talk and appeals to the audience to understand the gravity of the situation and try their best to conserve water.