

RAINWATER HARVESTING
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Global Rainwater Harvesting Organisation

Description of Initiative

Social Work and Research Centre, Tilonia, Ajmer District, Rajasthan, India which is also known as Barefoot College has since 1984 been involved in taking up community managed and controlled initiative(s) of rainwater harvesting from roof tops of rural schools and community centres.

This innovative barefoot approach of constructing rainwater harvesting structures through barefoot architects in diverse eco-zones of hilly, mountainous, coastal, plains, desert and tribal regions of India is visualised as a drought proofing measure and implemented as a time - bound and cost - effective initiative during pre-monsoon and post monsoon months in a year.

In principle each of the rainwater harvesting structures are constructed through community planned, implemented and managed process taking 60 days to complete. The structures are built using locally available material like limestone, bricks, sand, gravel, stone-slabs, cement and a handpump(s).

The underground tanks that are constructed to collect rainwater from roof tops in rural schools have a capacity to store 30,000 – 50,000 litres of rainwater at a cost of INR 1.50 per litre. This collectively planned managed and controlled efforts of the community (ies) has voluntary labour as a built-in component whenever such structures are constructed.

Rainwater Harvesting through rooftops is a time – tested, centuries old, traditional technology, which is being revived and applied through community's own collective initiatives to meet their drinking water needs, especially in areas which are drought prone, facing acute water scarcity.

As an innovative approach, this initiative has zero maintenance costs after its completion and is managed and controlled by the communities themselves where rural women are equal partners having financial and budgetary powers. It is the cheapest and only sustainable alternative for communities in diverse eco-zones facing acute scarcity of drinking water.

The initiative of collecting rainwater from roof tops in rural schools and community centres in principle emphasises the construction of rural latrines (water seal type) in order to mobilise rural communities on the environmental issue of Water and Sanitation. The rainwater harvesting structures ensure access by children and the community at large, to safe and potable drinking water.

The underground tanks can be replenished by tankers in the villages in order that drinking water is accessed by them, throughout the year. The structures are constructed in rural schools and community centres to enable the safe and healthy growth of children as well as their parents. The implementation process of this community managed and controlled initiative entails that the poorest of the poor in villages are provided with gainful employment through wages. Village Committees consisting of equal membership from women are involved in their selection as well as the disbursement of wages to them. Guaranteed wages for 60 days in the construction of these structures check migration of the rural poor to far-off towns and cities and be able to improve the quality of their lives as well as meeting their basic necessities.

Mainstreaming / Sustainability

Advocacy of Rainwater Harvesting initiatives have been carried out for planning at the national level through national workshops, action plans and implementing them in diverse eco – zones of the country. Mobilisation of rural communities for its advocacy has been initiated through wall papers, posters, street plays, songs and use of traditional media like puppetry in different dialects and languages.

For the process involved in this initiative to be mainstreamed at the national level, activities that need to be generated are the identification of Community Based Organisations working in different eco-zones and their coming together in national workshops(s) for drawing up Action Plans in their respective regions.

The process would involve those organisations who have an on-going involvement with rural / tribal communities in order that they begin by setting up Village Water Committees. These should have equal membership of men and women with full financial and budgetary powers to implement the Plan of Action and its financial layout. This process elicits transparency and accountability amongst the communities as well as the organisations working with them apart from the existing local self government.

This community planned and managed initiative is the cheapest and cost effective in financial terms since the rainwater harvesting structures are constructed in public buildings like rural schools and centres where the communities have the ownership as well as accountability. Use of locally available material and the labour– intensiveness enables the initiative to do away altogether with investment on expensive equipment and machinery.

Replicating the Initiative

Rainwater Harvesting through collection of rainwater from roof tops in rural schools and community centres as an innovative initiative can be applied in other countries and regions of the world which have poor, reasonably moderate and good rainfall.

In most of the countries and regions, some form of traditionally harvesting rainwater exist which needs to be applied for its widest replication at the decentralised level. The very nature and process of involving communities in the planning, management, control and ownership makes its widest replication possible as best practices.

Barefoot College's (SWRC, Tilonia) initiatives through construction of rainwater harvesting structures has witnessed the emergence of semi-literate and literate rural women as barefoot managers adept in taking them up as drought proofing measures and maintaining simple financial records as well as documents.

Experiences through such initiatives since 1984 has indicated increased attendance of children in rural primary schools especially girls and more importantly ensuring continued access to safe drinking water and thereby improving their health and sanitation.