

RAINWATER HARVESTING A Global Initiative

For hundreds of years rural communities all over the world have been collecting rainwater where it falls. In their fields, in open tanks and in traditional wells. It was a technology that was accepted and applied on a large scale in the deserts, tribal regions and in the mountains.

What is new is that for the first time this age old practice of collecting rainwater is being suggested as serious alternative to the modern solutions implemented by engineers and experts of taking water out of the ground at tremendous cost. Instead of hand pumps and piped water supply systems that is very expensive and wasteful a global initiative is being launched to coincide with the UN Year of Freshwater in 2003.

The global campaign of collecting rainwater will have very simple objectives:

1. To use traditional knowledge, skills and locally available materials and construct tanks in remote rural schools and community services (dispensaries, libraries, hospitals, family planning centres etc) from the roof tops ONLY so that more drinking water is available at almost no cost. In schools because experience has shown in brackish water areas just for the sweet drinking water mothers are prepared to send their children to school.
2. Divert surface run off into unused and abandoned open wells in villages so that more water percolates into the ground and revitalises dry hand pumps and irrigation wells assets that are unused. Where this has been done visual studies have shown that several hundred thousand litres have percolated into the ground within days. The same volume of water would take years to percolate naturally through open tanks to 100 ft below the ground.

What makes this Global Initiative different?

By making small dams across rivulets and gullies and collecting water in artificial tanks is also rainwater harvesting. This is a practice widely followed in watershed development programmes in many countries. In social forestry, land reclamation and dryland projects rainwater harvesting practices are also followed.

But what makes this different and unique is that this initiative is concentrated only on collecting rainwater in vast quantities in rural schools from the rooftops. The effort will be to provide water to poor children who should not have to walk for miles to fetch water. It is to make sure that this will increase the attendance of children and dropouts in schools. In community centres for women the idea of collecting rainwater in these centres is to attract women to meet and attend meetings to talk about legal literacy, wages, income generating activities. With the water must come sanitation (hand flushed latrines).

Where schools will be covered with rainwater harvesting structures with capacity ranging from 30,000 to 100,000 litres enough to meet the needs of children depending on the attendance for at least 4 months the village will also be surveyed for abandoned open wells where surface water could be channelled into these wells as a long term "drought proofing" measure. If more water is stored under the ground and evaporation losses are minimised then the possibility of dry hand pumps being revitalised in the villages are irrigation wells having more water is greatly enhanced.

The Initiative will work towards forming a Collective with a legal status located in the South and involving many stakeholders with grassroot influence and presence as active members. They will be actually constructing the tanks with community support and management so that it is owned by the community. Anywhere in the world the cost should not be more than \$ 0.20 cents/litre. In other words a rainwater harvesting tank collecting 100,000 litres should cost less than \$ 20,000 complete.

If a major fundamental policy shift towards accepting rainwater harvesting as a viable cost effective alternative for drinking water can be the end result of this Initiative then the campaign will have been successful. It is envisaged that partnerships involving donors, community based organisations, government and private companies will emerge and grow as the process of sensitisation begins and a mandate is received from all the stakeholders to push this initiative forward in 2003.

Implementation Conference: Stakeholder Action For Our Common Future

COLLABORATIVE STAKEHOLDER ACTION PLAN

CREATE A GLOBAL RAINWATER HARVESTING COLLECTIVE

Draft for Discussion

1. NEW ORGANISATION

It will be called the Global Rainwater Harvesting Collective (GRWHC)

2. LEGAL STATUS

It will have a legal status. This is to enable the GRWHC to receive funds to carry out its function and implement the Objectives contained in the Constitution.

3. LOCATION

The registered body will be registered and located in India.

4. OBJECTIVES

- i) To identify countries, regions and locations where the RWH structures will have an immediate impact in the quality of life of the rural poor
- ii) To locate partners with a proven record in implementing grass root drinking water projects
- iii) To construct RWH structures using traditional masons (barefoot architects), local materials, traditional knowledge and skills. The idea is to reduce the dependency on urban skills and engineers and demonstrate that communities can do it themselves.
- iv) To apply and receive funds from all sources who believe that RWH is a viable cost effective alternative to providing access to drinking water in non-potable areas around the world
- v) To contact, identify, promote and encourage existing organisations to further the aims and objectives of the GRWHC.
- vi) To concentrate on the location of RWH structures in remote rural schools and community places where water is accessible to the vulnerable sections of rural society (women and children)
- vii) To document the projects being implemented audio-visually with a view to using the short films to promote it to a wider audience thus replicating the idea in other areas.
- viii) To hold regional seminars and workshops sharing practical experiences with communities in the South where drinking water is scarce and women have to walk for long distances.
- ix) To involve grass root women in the decision making regarding location of the RWH structures, the labour to be employed, the wages to be paid and the technology to be used for water proofing etc.
- x) To identify competent monitoring organisations to study the impact of the approach using practitioners at the grassroots level

5. FOUNDER MEMBERS

A list of Founder Members to be invited to initiate the GRWHC will be drawn up keeping in mind the following

- their capacity to raise funds
- their grass root contacts and ability to implement projects at the village level
- their standing at the international level

The Founder Members will be by written invitation.

6. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Members of the Executive Committee will be selected from the Founder Members.

7. ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

This will be open to all organisations who would like to be an active member of the Collective.

8. MANDATE

The Mandate for the Collective to come into existence will be requested in the following events on Rainwater Harvesting:

a) At the Implementation Conference in August 2002 Johannesburg: Founding meeting of the GRWHC

b) At the Habitat International Coalition meeting in August 2002 Johannesburg

c) At the Dryland Committee Meeting where 30 organisations will be present from 5 African countries funded by NORAD in Sudan October 2002

d) At a meeting called by PLAN Netherlands expected to be called by the new Minister for Development Cooperation

9. TIME/WORK PLAN

By the end of the year 2002 the registration of the Collective should have been completed.

By the end of the year the tempo for keeping Rainwater Harvesting on top of the drinking water Agenda will have been maintained in various national and international forums thus making it attractive for international support on a global scale.

By the end of the year it is expected to receive some pledges from potential donors. It will be a time when the Year of Freshwater will be fresh in their minds and a contribution will be expected to be made.

The **purpose** of the working session at the IC is to make stakeholders aware of rainwater harvesting and get the mandate of the stakeholders for a Global Collective. At a smaller meeting at the IC, the formal founding of the Collective shall be achieved.

The working session is likely to be held on Sunday, August 25th, 9am –6.30 pm (IUCN Center).

Bunker Roy, Barefoot College, India is leading the discussions on this Action Plan.
