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Harvesting rainwater: essential to achieve 6.1 and for water security

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Organized by: International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (IRHA), Lanka Rainwater Harvesting Forum, South Asia Rainwater Network (SARNET), Rainwater Harvesting Association of Malawi (RHAM), Rain for All, American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association (ARCSA), Asociación Mexicana de Sistemas de Captación de Agua de Lluvia A.C. (AMSCALL)

Background

Current water supply coverage still leaves out 7 to 11% of the world population. Households do not have ready access to safe water or face seasonal shortages. Remoteness and physical difficulties may prevent public water services to arrive for quite some years. Schools and healthcare centres similarly often face water shortages. All could benefit from rainwater collection and storage. With rising water scarcity in many localities, rainwater harvesting and storage will secure a source of good quality water that can be made into a safe supply for drinking, food preparation and personal hygiene.

Rainwater harvesting is insufficiently valued by planners as a water supply option mainly because storage is deemed expensive. Households view it differently as they collect rainwater by any means possible to offset the inconvenience and costs of the lack of a regular supply. Adequate public awareness together with local knowledge and skills on water storage technologies will help increase the practice of rainwater harvesting and raise water security and resilience in the community.

Rainwater harvesting and management is a critical aspect of rural development, for farmers to collect and store water for the next crop and to ensure that sufficient water remains available in local ecosystems. In urban settings, management of rainwater is an essential component of water resources management through infiltration and surface storage opportunities to buffer water and reduce flooding and to keep water available during dry periods. Rainwater harvesting

is an important measure for climate change adaptation, providing water for living and survival. Shrubs and trees are watered and help cooling of homes and settlements.

Water Action Agenda

The International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance and its national partners commit to accelerate implementation and application of rainwater harvesting and management through further capacity building and advocacy ([global-alliance-improve-water-security-through-promoting-rainwater-harvesting](#)). Our actions will enable decentralized, local solutions that will substantially scale up to achieving SDG6. Rainwater harvesting solutions contribute to sustainable water resources and raise climate change resilience. Implementation through domestic and local initiatives is quite feasible and will raise ownership to the solution. Rainwater harvesting will yield local benefits well after a public water supply has reached the community.

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- Rainwater harvesting and safe storage is currently used by 1.3% of the global population (JMP2017) but offers a solution to at least a further 6% of the world population as a regular supply or as a supplement (IRHA assessment 2018).
- With currently marketed household water treatment systems, rainwater can be produced as a safely managed drinking water supply. Similarly, treatment of rainwater will make it safe to use in schools and health centres.
- Where groundwater is chemically compromised (e.g. by arsenic or fluoride), drinking rainwater will bring health protection (CKDu Sri Lanka,).
- Ecosystem wide rainwater harvesting measures (rural) and managed aquifer recharge (urban) will restore and strengthen local aquifers seasonally, covering dry season deficits.
- Standardization and regulation of rainwater harvesting systems technology will bring in the private sector as a partner in promoting the effective use of rainwater in institutions (schools, hospitals, factories, university campuses and hotels) and urban settings.
- Continue to highlight the many examples of effective rainwater harvesting projects around the world and use their learning for future initiatives.

Key recommendations for action (5 – 6 bullet points)

- Continue to promote rainwater harvesting as a decentralized water supply solution for those households, that so far have been left behind.
- Focus on ecosystem restoration and watershed management to ensure profitable use of rainfall, through infiltration and slowing down the flow of water in the landscape.
- Encourage storage through natural depressions and wetlands, farm level ponds and nature-based solutions that encourage infiltration and urban rainwater management.
- Facilitate financing of rainwater harvesting initiatives as part of development of housing infrastructure and as part of rural development, through regular government programmes.
- Strengthen the role of NGOs and the private sector in delivering suitable rainwater harvesting systems through information sharing and capacity building.