



WEBINAR (III) - COVID 19, RAINWATER HARVESTING: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES.

The webinar highlighted increased water use in the South Asia region, issues related to contamination that has taken a back seat with Covid 19 such as the Arsenic contamination and the increased pressure on ground water table. The participants shared their observations on the potential of rainwater harvesting as a mitigatory measure.

Water Management experts from South Asia Region highlights the need for exploring alternative sources due to the increased demand for water with the Covid 19 pandemic

The 3rd in the series the webinar organized by South Asia Rainwater Harvesting Network(SARNET): “Covid 19, Rainwater Harvesting; issues, challenges and best practices” concluded on the 29th of January 2021 with the active participation of 20 water management experts, activists and government representatives from South Asia.

Rajindra Ariyabandu Chairman of the Lanka Rainwater Harvesting Forum opening the discussion highlighted the benefits of rainwater harvesting facility during the Covid 19 lock downs for communities in Sri Lanka. A Lanka Rainwater Harvesting Forum survey of rain water harvesting households during the first wave of Covid 19 revealed that 92% of the households surveyed in 3 dry zone districts of Sri Lanka benefitted during the lock down as they had adequate water at their home for drinking, hand washing and cleaning purposes. The findings also revealed that 19% shared their water available in the rainwater harvesting tanks with others.

Dhanushi Senanayake Coordinator for the Regional Center of Lanka Rainwater Harvesting Forum updated on the progress of SARNET. At present the network has 30 members out of which 19 have updated their details on the Google form provided. SARNET presence is maintained on the social media platforms of Facebook, Linked in and Instagram. As part of SARNET activities already 2 webinars have been conducted and the current webinar is the 3rd in the series. As future activities the network plans to complete and launch the website, continue the webinar series, organize a hybrid symposium, develop publications and explore fundraising opportunities said Dhanushi. She also requested from participants to update details if they have not updated so far and to send content to be featured on the SARNET website.

The speakers at this webinar were Dr Suresh Kumar Rohilla Senior Director from Center for Science and Environment(CSE) India and Md Motaleb Hossain Sarker Director, Water Resources Management Division Center for Environmental and Geographic information Services from CEGIS Bangladesh and moderated by Han Heijnen from the International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance. In India where already groundwater has been extensively and excessively used and, with the Covid 19 situation the domestic water demand is

expected to grow from 40 to 55 trillion liters said Dr Suresh Kumar Rohilla. He further stated that in areas where earlier ground water was extracted from 20 Ft now have to extract from 250 to 300Ft below ground level. In such a situation, greater use of collected rainwater gives better service near the home Engineer Md Motaleb Hossain of CEGIS shared an update on water usage during Covid and the potential of rainwater harvesting in the context of Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, the safe water coverage-is still only 55% and in areas with arsenic contamination and salinity in water rainwater harvesting is practised. Rainwater harvested is used for drinking and cooking by 57 % while a 18% uses for cleaning and bathing and 42% use for all purposes. Covid 19 puts extra pressure on the water supply in urban areas. Water use has increased tremendously and at family level at least 30% to 40% is used for frequent handwashing, disinfecting groceries with soap water and taking showers multiple times. In Bangladesh arsenic contamination is also a silent hazard. According to WHO arsenic contamination affects 35 million people in Bangladesh. Annually 200 to 250 billion cubic metres of water is generated from rain in Bangladesh.

Pakistan with the view to promote rainwater harvesting has constructed 40,000 units after 2005 earth quake that affected the Northern mountainous parts of the country. . The government of Pakistan has initiated a climate resilient urban development policy that includes rainwater harvesting said Zaheed Gardezi, representing the Government of Pakistan, upon sharing an update about the country during the discussion in the webinar. Adding to the discussion Han Heijnen suggested that When government introduces water supply systems such systems should not replace the water harvesting mechanisms adopted by communities. Tarayana Foundation from Bhutan requested participants to share information regarding rainwater harvesting practices that can be applied particularly for hilly areas in the country. Raah Foundation from India shared an observation that introducing water structures managed by communities helps to create a sense of ownership, belonging, maintain equal distribution and judicious management of water. Han Heijnen as suggestions for topics of the next webinar mentioned; “How does availability of rainwater harvesting offer hope and opportunity for women, disabled and the elderly?” Dr Rohilla explained that water and sanitation should go hand in hand and thus should be discussed together. Upon concluding the webinar, the webinar moderator Han Heijnen of the International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance highlighted: “rainwater harvesting is an opportunity to become more resilient”.