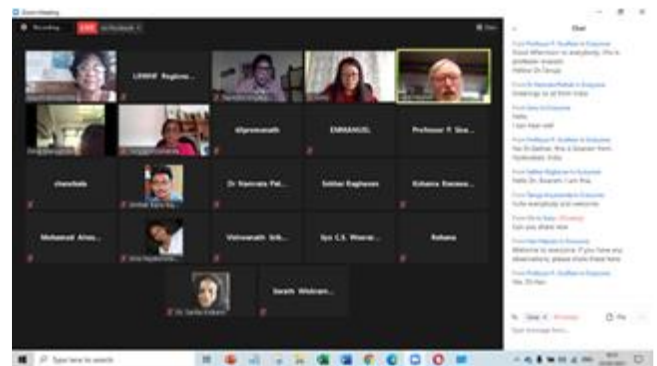




PEACE OF MIND THAT WATER BRINGS TO WOMEN

SARNET- Webinar 04



Daily women across South Asia spend most of their time fetching water for their household needs. Access to a water source becomes a key determinant in the quality of life. Rainwater harvesting has provided access to water at the doorstep for women thus enabling them to engage in economic activities, continue education and maintain good health while also preserving culture and traditions expressed the participants at the 4th webinar concluded on the 25th of February 2021.

This webinar was organized by the South Asia Rainwater Harvesting Network(SARNET) to share experiences on the impact of water availability from rainwater harvesting on the lives and livelihoods of women and, promote the viability of rainwater harvesting as a tool for empowering women. Sony Pun, Programme Officer, Rain Communities implemented by Kanchan Nepal and International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (IRHA) and Kusum Athukorala from Sri Lanka Water partnership were the key speakers at the event. Specialists in water and rainwater harvesting, practitioners engaged in water management, activists and policymakers from Sri Lanka, India and Nepal participated in the webinar.

Gagri (a vessel) will be filled and women of Thulakot, Nepal will be relieved from their arduous one-hour journey downhill to the springs

Sony Pun, Programme Officer, *Rain Communities* implemented by Kanchan Nepal and International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (IRHA) project sharing experiences had this to say: “for women from Thulakot in Nepal it takes more than one hour or longer to fetch a *Gagri* (a vessel) of water from the spring sources lying downhill as the region is located 25 km away from Pokhara city, at an altitude of 1400m. Sabitri Bhujel the Coordinator for Thulakot *Rain*

Communities has been seeking an organization to address water issues faced by her community. Through the *Rain Communities* project, 10 Rainwater Harvesting (RWH) systems in Thulakot, Ward were constructed. Not just for Sabitri Bhujel, for women from other households from this community too will be benefitted from the system. The scenic view of Thulakot with a beautiful view of the Himalayas on the northern side makes it a potential area to be developed as a destination for tourists. Women who have access to water at their homes using rainwater harvesting systems will be able to engage in income generation activities such as providing home stay facility for tourists or vegetable cultivation using methods such as drip irrigation. The 80-year-old Rathna Kumari is thankful to HELVETAS that saved her from toiling for water for the past 17 years by providing a rainwater harvesting tank and making water available at her doorstep. She claims that she has not suffered from any waterborne disease by consuming water from the rainwater harvesting tank.

Giving schools water allows girl children to come to school without problems related to sanitation or menstruation

Kusum Athukorala a senior advisor from the Sri Lanka Water partnership joining the webinar with a wealth of experiences as a professional in

water resources management highlighted the gaps in the system and recommendations for promoting rainwater harvesting. Endorsing the views shared by Sony from Nepal Kusum Athukorala stated that climate change is increasing the difficulties faced by women. However, even the overseas development funding facilities do not grant adequate financial support for women's issues or women's organizations. Water security has been a neglected aspect for a long time it has been viewed in silos, not in a holistic manner. Investments in rainwater harvesting need to carry out perception analysis as the first step and advocacy efforts need to have a wide-angle focus. Sharing her experience related to engaging schools Kusum highlighted that it is important to analyze schools demands and by engaging the parent-teacher association as a way of communicating and reaching the women at the household level about rainwater harvesting. "Giving schools water allows girl children to come to school without problems related to sanitation or menstruation" stated Kusum concluding her presentation.

Sony Pun from Nepal shared the experience of engaging the communities in reflecting on the availability of water resources, springs in the area and rainfall pattern. As part of the "Rain communities" project a three-dimensional map of the project area had been developed and subsequently shared with the community

members to understand and reflect on the resources available and their potential. Rain Communities project has also planned to continue community engagement to obtain updates using the "Farmer Diaries". The farmers who use rainwater harvesting, drip irrigation and polytunnels for cultivation will be constantly engaged to update on vegetables they grow, type of fertilizer used etc.

Having rainwater harvesting systems allow indigenous communities to preserve their cultural heritage

"In a year woman save 1000 to 1200 hours when they are provided access to water using rainwater harvesting system and 60 to 70% of women use this time for an income generation activity" stated Dr Sarika Kulkarni from Raah Foundation. These women use their income to buy vegetables for the first time for their families from this income. Women from this community daily consume two meals of rice earlier and the practices of consuming vegetables contribute to improving the health of these communities. Dr Kulkarni shared her observations from working with women from an indigenous population from western Ghats of Maharashtra where water becomes scarce after monsoons. Women from the tribal population who earlier had water available till October with rainwater harvesting now have water availability till March men about 12,000 in this community who used to engage in

labour migration now stay with their families and engage in agricultural activities. The water availability allows the tribal communities time to engage in art and dance forms unique to their culture. Thus, it confirms that providing access and availability of water to women contributes to preserving indigenous cultural heritage and the wellbeing of the community.

In Sri Lanka regulations related to the water sector identifies rainwater harvesting is an important water supply option for most parts of Sri Lanka

Lal Premanath the former General Manager at National Water Supply and Drainage Board currently representing the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka joining to share observations stated that in Sri Lanka for areas that cannot be provided pipe-borne water supply rainwater harvesting is the only available option particularly when the water quality also become a concern. In Sri Lanka, the Kilinochchi area in the north and central hills in plantation areas supplying water was a problem. He further stated that the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka in developing a policy for the water sector in respect of regulations will highlight that rainwater harvesting is an important option for most of the country.

“Is rainwater harvesting seen as a suboptimal solution stifling all other solutions?”

A query from Kusum Athukorala to the participants was: “How many countries in South Asia have a national rainwater harvesting policy and do these plans need to be amended considering the new reality of climate change in the post-Covid 19 situation?” Han Heijnen President of the International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (IRHA) facilitating the discussion answering this question stated that Nepal has a ministerial guideline on rainwater harvesting. Rajindra Ariyabandu Chairman of the Lanka Rainwater Harvesting Forum stated that the rainwater harvesting policy has received cabinet approval and shared with relevant stakeholders but very little emphasis on implementation of the policy is evident. Vishwanath Srikantaiah joining from Bangalore shared his observations related to the gaps and recommendations needed in the policy environment. In India, at a national level, the plan is to provide water from a functional tap for every household by 2024. The demand for water for flushing has increased as a result of the sanitation scheme launched by the government. Currently, the national water policy is at the draft stage and there is only a mention of the rainwater harvesting system as supplementary water and it is unlikely that the government will fund provide funding for such programmes. Meanwhile, in Chennai and Bangalore for every household, it is mandatory to practice rainwater harvesting for storage and groundwater

recharging. While in Mumbai for all new constructions it is mandatory to have rooftop rainwater harvesting. However, only Bangalore has been able to enforce this practice as the water supply is granted to households when they provide proof of the rainwater harvesting system being constructed and as a fine is levied if the system is not operational. "Rainwater harvesting has been seen in different lenses: as floodwater management and a storage system," said Viswanath sharing his thoughts on the policy environment related to rainwater harvesting. Commenting further Vishwanath posed a question whether rainwater harvesting is seen as a suboptimal solution stifling all other solutions?" On a concluding note, participants agreed that rainwater harvesting must be promoted as a comprehensive solution.

Upon answering a query about SARNET activities targeting Water Day Dhanushi Senanayake Coordinator of SARNET for Lanka Rainwater harvesting Forum stated that SARNET will be launched during the World Water Week. She requested participants to send in their stories of success, publications, videos etc., to be featured in SARNET. Concluding the webinar Rajindra Ariyabandu thanked participants for joining to make SARNET webinar vibrant and insightful.