



'Harvesting the monsoon: livelihoods reborn', published in the March 2000 edition of LEISA Magazine, documents how in Rajasthan, India, traditional water harvesting was revitalised and local rivers were transformed from ephemeral to perennial. Rajendra Singh, chairman of the NGO which started the initiative, talks about his next steps – launching World Water Walks. He recently received the Stockholm Water Prize for his efforts.

Rajendra Singh

This is the 21st century of exploitation, pollution and encroachment of water resources. Meeting challenges has always been a huge part of my life. When I went to Alwar, this semi-arid area was unhealthy and impoverished. The aquifers were completely dry. We started conserving the rainwater so that it wouldn't evaporate or flow away and be wasted. Using traditional wisdom we built

johads (small dams) to recharge the underground aquifers. And because of that wisdom and those efforts, the area became fertile, prosperous and dead rivers came to life again. And those who had abandoned their villages came back again. The unique part of the whole process was the active community participation, which gives the community a sense of ownership over the assets they have created.



Active participation by the community in Rajasthan gave them a sense of ownership over the water harvesting assets created. Photo: TBS

What now? World peace is only possible when everyone gets clean and pure drinking water. Water resource conservation and management will continue to be a climate change adaptation strategy for people living with rainfall variability, both for domestic supply and to enhance crop, livestock and other forms of agriculture. Decreasing water poverty by increasing water productivity will be key for the coming era. Demand-side control of water resources is urgent for sustainable supply-side management.

We are launching World Water Walks along the rivers and lakes of five continents over the next five years. The walks aim to connect local communities to their water and secure their water rights. Walk themes and ‘outdoor classrooms’ will provide the opportunity

The World Water Walks aim to connect local communities to their water and secure their water rights. Photo: TBS



Water resource conservation will continue to be a climate change adaptation strategy

to ask questions and to understand the complexity around water issues. Can reviving the flow of water in landscapes reduce the inequalities that face the world and ensure a more peaceful era for the planet? Do world spiritual traditions and the importance of water in them have a resonance and some teachings for us in this modern age? And, what can we learn from local communities which have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the environment for millennia?

The first of a series of walks was from Holy Island of Lindisfarne to Belford in the UK. The walkers, local community members, politicians and church leaders as well as an international contingent, participated in a powerful discussion on water and climate change. Walks are already scheduled in Sweden, the USA and Germany and by 2016 water walks in all participating countries will be organised.

Rajendra Singh (jalpurushlbs@gmail.com) is the chairman of Tarun Bharat Sangh, an organisation working for holistic development of all, regardless of economic situation, caste or religion in India. He also heads a national network of organisations working on water issues, Rashtriya Jal Biradari, working for restoration of all mighty and small rivers of India.