



## **Rainwater Harvesting Projects in Sri Lanka**

Following the Tsunami in 2005 and SOS Malta's emergency aid interventions in Sri Lanka, the NGO took a decision to start implementing Rain Water Harvesting Projects as part of its overseas development work. This was because SOS Malta noted that most of the communities where it was working were unable to reach or afford safe drinking water and water sanitation.

The benefits of rainwater harvesting (RWH) have been long underestimated. And yet, it is one of the simplest and inexpensive methods which can be adopted in working towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal for drinking water by 2015 in areas where people have no access to reliable sources of water.

SOS Malta acknowledges water as a human right and recognises the key role of water in agriculture, energy, health as well as in combating poverty. Access to clean drinking water and sanitation is a precondition for success in the fight against poverty, hunger, child deaths and gender inequality.

SOS Malta is committed to enhancing all efforts to satisfy basic human rights and help meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is therefore resolute in contributing towards the right to access to water and sanitation, and in advocating for the attainment of MDG7, target 10:

**To half the proportion of people  
without sustainable access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation  
by 2015**

In 2006, SOS Malta set as its objective the kick-start of rainwater harvesting at a community level in Sri Lanka. Its long-term aims were to:

- Provide technical support for the design of a tailor-made inexpensive domestic rainwater harvesting system suitable for Sri Lankans;
- Provide training to a number of local trainees on the benefits of domestic rainwater harvesting as well as on the sizing and the putting-in-place of the domestic rainwater harvesting system in houses. The trainees will also be trained to carry out basic water quality tests so as to demonstrate that rainwater is actually cleaner and safer than or a par with their current water supplies;
- Distribute a number of components for the installation of domestic rainwater harvesting systems to a number of households at a subsidized price, and hand-hold the households in the proper installation of the system. (It is especially important to identify the more influential people in the community who may not necessarily be the most needy and encourage these people to be the first to take the plunge.)

- Monitor and offer guidance in the optimum utilization of the rainwater being collected;
- Evaluation and dissemination of results among stakeholders;
- Lobbying to make rainwater harvesting techniques standard in all building Designs and Bills of Quantities, in all future new Government buildings, as utility and demonstration purposes, within a prescribed time;
- Survey and evaluate the possibility of incorporating rainwater harvesting techniques in community and public buildings, such as schools. This will provide the opportunity for mass demonstration of rainwater harvesting at work;
- Liaise with Universities, Technical Colleges, National Institutes of Education and Health, and Government Training Institutions, to include rainwater harvesting in their curricula. This will encourage awareness and research & development in such systems;
- Propagate the message through religious institutions, by incorporating (and partially funding) water harvesting practices in their establishments;
- Identify and conduct awareness programmes for consumers on the economic benefits of the domestic rainwater harvesting system

SOS Malta noted the difficult choices which face rural people every day in some parts of Sri Lanka. Is it the family, the cow or the withering crops which is going to survive! It is for this reason that SOS Malta decided to address the need for water on a long term sustainable people oriented basis. This involved promotion of the concept of RWH, keeping in mind the village as a unique individual unit. To overcome the pitfalls of sub standard construction and general village apathy, the concept of voluntary unpaid labour was introduced.

SOS Malta initiated rural development initiatives in 5 villages in the Matara district through intervention in the areas of health, nutrition, education and community organization. SOS Malta entered the field of supporting community based ventures for rain water harvesting as a way of impacting rural lives in many ways.

Rain Water Harvesting is accepted as one of the most eco-friendly, sustainable solution for a community. However, its success is entrenched in the capability of the community to come together, own the project, provide labour and look after and maintain the created structures. Community mobilization and involvement are thus the key.



*Identification of a natural spring (rain-water)*



*Siphoning off the natural water spring*

A participatory approach of all the concerned parties – the entire village community, the Sri Lankan NGO Healing Hands Women's Organisation, Lanka Forum as the technical support team and local authority representatives is advocated for the RWH projects which always involve a variety of skills, disciplines and competencies.



*Underground water-storage for a school and orphanage in Weligama, Sri Lanka*

To reach maximum effectiveness SOS Malta felt the need to train a core team from our ground contacts in Sri Lanka and together with SCESA and SHARE from Mumbai India organized and funded a training program in the Raigad district in India for 5 persons including a mason.

Sessions were planned to achieve specific goals:

- How to assess a village and identify the existing and potential water resources
- Understand the difference between surface water and recharge ponds
- Study the various methods used to cordon the spring water
- Learn different methods used for agricultural ponds
- Learn the methods used for recharging the bore wells
- Learn the methods used for siphoning the water from a tank
- To understand the issues relevant to women
- Exposure to livelihood programs for women
- Learn how to conduct a PRA (participatory rural appraisal)

During the extensive training program 15 villages were visited where RWH projects were completed and goals achieved were:

- Rain Water Harvesting projects to be implemented in Sri Lanka
- To bring awareness about water conservation
- To use water as an entry point to a village
- To share RWH knowledge with other developmental organizations

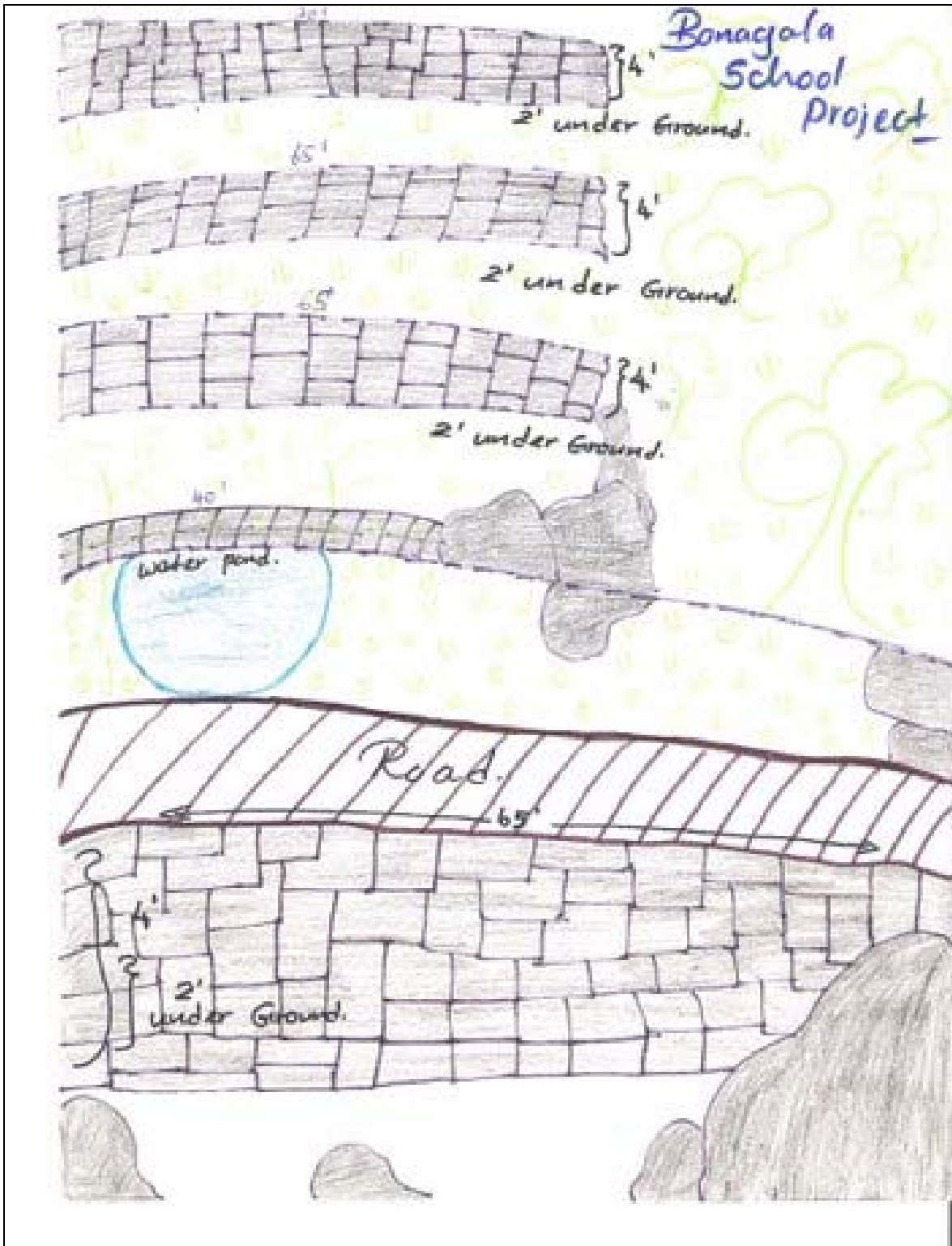


*A domestic water tank produced locally for the rain-water harvesting projects implemented by SOS Malta and Healing Hands in the villages.*



*A rainwater harvesting tank providing clean water to an isolated crèche in one of the tea estates in Sri Lanka*

At the end of 2008, SOS Malta identified other villages and areas in Sri Lanka where it will be assisting with the establishment of rainwater harvesting systems in upcoming months. The major part of its interventions will focus on villages within the tea estates around the South-Eastern region.



Technical Drawing for Rain-water harvesting project at the Bonagala School (2007)