

The Maharaja and the Waterman



Jal Bhagirathi Foundation (JBF) is the outcome of the persistent and committed efforts by Maharaja of Marwar, Gaj Singh, and *Paani Baba* (the Water Man), Rajendra Singh.

Despite the apparent diversity in their ways of life, this collaboration had a strong commonality – to develop a persuasive alliance with the people of Marwar to make the region water secure. Maharaja Gaj Singh was dedicated to making village communities self-reliant in Marwar. Rajendra Singh was keen to replicate the experiences of Tarun Bharat Sangh in water-scarce regions of western Rajasthan.

Rajendra Singh and his colleague Prithvi Raj Singh had often thought of Maharaja Gaj Singh as a potential partner in the region, but they were unable to establish contact with him. Then came the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Rajendra's path-breaking work on community based traditional water systems and the Maharaja read all about him. The meeting between the two was facilitated by Prithvi Raj Singh and the stage was set for initiating a similar movement in Marwar.

A workshop was organized in Jodhpur on October 5, 2001 with farmers and community leaders representing all the seven districts of the Marwar region. The workshop concluded with a decision to launch a movement in the region to mobilize and build the capacity of distressed communities in institutionalizing effective water governance in the region and development of their villages.

When a *Jal Chetna Yatra* (Public Awareness Campaign) was organised from October 6-8, 2001, thousands of villagers came forward spontaneously.

Construction of numerous water harvesting structures commenced in villages. This encouraging response laid the foundation for upscaling this initiative to other parts of the region. With the endorsement by the people of Marwar, a *Jal Samwad* (Water Dialogue) was held on January 11, 2002 to achieve a general consensus on the formation of an organisation. Principal community leaders pledged their support. The alliance was then instituted as a Trust with Rajendra Singh and Prithvi Raj Singh from Tarun Bharat Sangh and Maharaja Gaj Singh and Maharani Hemlata Rajye representing the House of Marwar.

**The region receives only 100-500 mm rainfall annually
It has a declining water table at a rate of 1-2 meters per year (2-5 meters per year in some parts)**



Marwar

Land Blessed and Cursed



On a leafy pond, tucked into a shady corner of Jodhpur's magnificent 15th century fortress of Mehrangarh, there stands a tiny temple. Exuding serenity, it looks out over the outer walls of the fortress at the bustling old walled city of Jodhpur – that part of the city washed blue by her pious Brahmins.

In 1459 this temple was raised in honour of an old hermit called Cheeria Nathji, the Lord of the Birds, by the Rathore ruler Rao Jodha.

Indeed, the story of the city of Jodhpur begins with Cheeria Nathji, who had lived here in contemplative isolation when Jodha's masons shattered his tranquility. Irrate, he cursed the Rathore, "Jodha! May your kingdom always suffer a scarcity of water!" A terrible curse anywhere, but in this harsh and inhospitable land, in the eastern extremities of the Great Indian Thar Desert, a land still called Marwar -The Land of Death, it heralded doom itself. And yet for thousands of years men have fought and died to conquer this land. To possess. To tame. For, like all deserts, it is a blessed land; rich in culture, secure in religion, indomitable in spirit.

The curse of Cheeria Nathji still exists. Marwar with an area of one hundred and thirty five thousand square kilometers is known for its fragile eco-system characterized by limited surface water availability, depleted groundwater resource, low and erratic rainfall. Drought in the region has been a recurrent phenomena, as is evident from the fact that 43 out of the last 50 years have been drought years affecting approximately 12.2 million human population. As a consequence the region is marred by extreme economic backwardness.

Popular belief has it that the Rathore rulers continue to atone for the terrible curse of the hermit.

Certainly, when Maharaja Gaj Singh stepped out of the palace onto the sandy wastes of the desert on the Water Crusade of Jal Bhagirathi Foundation, he was only treading in the footsteps of his forefathers — a very fine tradition followed by generations of Rathore rulers to make their beloved Marwar, a water sufficient region.....

Marwar has the highest density of arid zone population in the world with 89 people and 223 livestock per sq km



Meaningful Partnerships



The Italian supported UNDP Project, “Vulnerability Reduction through Community Management and Control of Water in the drought-prone areas of the Marwar Region”, implemented by Jal Bhagirathi Foundation supports social mobilization efforts and strengthens people’s organizations for sustainable natural resource management, ensures women’s empowerment and advocates community’s rights over common property resources.

Project Components

- Construction of approximately 500 water harvesting structures in 400 villages in Barmer, Pali and Jodhpur Districts of Marwar, with community participation that ensures one fourth contribution through ‘*shramdaan*’ in the form of land/labour/material/cash
- Creation of a Water Resource Centre (Jal Ashram) for training of village volunteers, experience sharing, fostering partnerships, networking, disseminating ‘best practices’ and policy advocacy

The Jal Bhagirathi program supported by the Italian Development Cooperation will make a very significant impact on availability of water and drought proofing of the villages in the Thar Desert

- Water for schools: Construction of water harvesting structures in schools and mobilization to promote environmental education and the importance of hygiene in schools
- Regeneration of pasture lands and forests, plantation of multi purpose trees and crops that require little water
- Organization of Women Self Help Groups for micro credit activities towards income generation and to ensure women’s representation in decision making on issues of rights and responsibilities, girl child education and child marriages
- Establishment of networks to collaborate with government at the District, State and Central level to influence the National Water Policy in a holistic manner so as to ensure that the control of water remains with the communities and not just the State, promoting food security and long term environment sustainability in the process
- Integration of traditional technologies with twin objectives of overall social development and women’s empowerment leading to sustainable livelihood opportunities for the people of Marwar region

Results

- Increased water availability for humans and livestock
- Awareness generated on need for water conservation
- Equitable distribution of resources at community levels
- Less burden on adolescent girls and women of survival tasks that include water, fuel and fodder collection
- Participation of women and marginalized communities in the decision making process
- Income generation among women through micro credit activities
- Improved quality of ground water
- Provision and supply of drinking water
- Sustainable agricultural practices and fodder development
- Sustainable livelihood opportunities





Water Harvesting Structures

Project Component – 1

Context

- Nearly 64 per cent people in the project area do not have access to safe drinking water
- Overburdened women have to trudge 2-5 km to fetch a pitcher of water
- High female dropout rate from schools because they have to fetch drinking water
- Neglect of the rich tradition of water harvesting techniques and systems

Interventions

- Formation of water-user associations/ *Jal Sabhas* for community management of water resources
- Desilting, renovation or excavation of traditional village ponds (*talabs/nadis*)
- Construction of water channels for village ponds

The Jal Bhagirathi project supports traditional systems of rain-water harvesting, which are more resilient and responsive to crisis than “modern” methods based on intensive exploitation of groundwater

- Construction of community rain water harvesting tanks (*tankas*)
- Construction of rain water harvesting tanks (*tankas*) in the village school

Outcomes/Benefits

- An empowered community managing their water resources in a sustainable manner
- Water security for the community during summer and in the event of drought
 - Water channels will ensure larger inflow of harvested rain water to the village ponds
 - Construction of village ponds (*talabs/nadis*) provides water for drinking in the hot summer months
 - Community and school rain water harvesting tanks (*tankas*) will ensure supply of clean drinking water
 - More leisure time for women and study time for children

Objectives

- To create village institutions to rejuvenate rich water harvesting traditions
- To increase water availability for human and livestock population
- To enhance women’s empowerment by reducing drudgery
- To enhance livelihood opportunities by providing water for livestock in times of drought



Water Resource Centre

Project Component – 4

Context

- A cadre of committed local volunteers is a prerequisite to strengthen democratic systems, to lead development interventions and rejuvenate village communities
- It is necessary to inculcate a feeling of community service and involvement in the democratic process among development workers, community members, grassroots functionaries or potential leaders
- The Resource Centre will be a fountainhead of all organizational activities providing exposure and orientation to volunteers through experience sharing and building capacities

Interventions

- Disseminate functional and conceptual knowledge through interaction with development workers, grassroots functionaries, government officials, and civil society groups from all over India
- Disseminate 'best practices' in community management, decentralized governance,

community mobilization and control of natural resources through formal lectures, training camps, workshops and field visits

- Organize visits and gathering of community members
- Organize national and regional conferences, conventions, workshops and symposiums
- Produce, publish and distribute documents, newsletters, pamphlets, etc on important issues and policies in order to strengthen advocacy for pro-poor initiatives

The Water Resource Centre will build a cadre of volunteers and promote Community Management of Natural Resources, while providing a platform for advocacy of rights issues

Outcomes/Benefits

- Creation of a force of committed and enlightened volunteers
- Promotion of exchange of ideas leading to better understanding and informed decision-making
- Promotion of social cohesion and emotive bonding among communities through continued interaction
- Increase in the level of public awareness and understanding of concerns that influence the lives of poor and disadvantaged groups
- Strengthening of existing civil society networks
- Fostering partnerships networking and policy advocacy

Objectives

To provide a venue, forum or platform for :

- Developing a cadre of committed volunteers
- Exchange of ideas for the community and visitors
- Creating public awareness and voicing pro-poor concerns
- Networking and policy advocacy





Water for Schools

Project Component – 2

Context

- Most schools do not have drinking water and toilet facilities
- Over 70 per cent children suffer from bone and water-borne diseases due to high fluoride content in water and poor sanitation
- Children, especially girls, spend more time in bringing drinking water than in attending schools

Interventions

- Construction of *tankas* (rainwater harvesting structures) in village schools
- Mobilisation to promote environmental education and importance of hygiene in schools
- Formation of Children's Water Management Groups (*Jal Dal*) to manage the roof top water harvesting structures (*tankas*)

Outcomes/Benefits

- Supply of clean drinking water for school children
- Greater environmental awareness among children
- Better attendance and decrease in number of school drop outs
- Enhanced water security for students during summer and in the event of a drought

Impact of the project in the last two years

- 95% increase in availability of drinking water
- 97.6% households individually benefited
- 95.1% community benefited
- 68.3% reduction in distance for fetching drinking water
- 80.5 % increase in drinking water availability for livestock

The
Jal Bhagirathi
project ensures
supply of clean
drinking water for
school children

Objectives

- To ensure safe drinking water for school children
- To improve personal and public hygiene in schools
- To sensitize children through environment and health workshops or awareness generation programs





Advocacy of Rights Issues

Project Component – 3

Context

- The policy changes require a paradigm shift from the current emphasis on drought relief to preparedness
- Existing drought relief measures are based on old famine and scarcity codes, where it is an act of benevolence by the State
- Agriculture policy promotes intensive monoculture of high-yielding crops encouraging rich farmers to use unsustainable quantities of water
- Laws are required urgently to address ground water depletion and its intensive exploitation
- Policies are required to reduce conflict over competing water users
- Institutional reforms with better functional coordination between the Ministries of water resources, power, agriculture, rural development and environment is required
- Facilitate the government, opinion makers and civil society members to come together on a common platform to discuss, debate, and influence water laws and policies
- Build a network of NGOs and CBOs working on issues of community management and control of water to address the State and National water policy
- Organize National and Regional level workshop and conferences to create an enabling environment for policy reforms
- Document and disseminate 'best practices' in community management and control of water resources throughout the country

JBF has developed a comprehensive advocacy strategy that focuses on creating awareness, generating constructive responses, eliciting partnerships and developing conscientious citizens

Outcomes/Benefits

- Formulation of effective government policies and laws that promote efficient water management practices
- Formation of a public opinion for better water management laws and policies
- Linking the drought relief programs of the government to water resource development projects
- A system of regular consultation between communities, policy-makers and voluntary organizations would be created

Interventions

- Demonstrate through the project activities the importance of community's rights over water resources for sustainable livelihood
- Develop models of 'best practices' for replication which can be adapted to local conditions

Objectives

- A holistic water policy which addresses the emerging concerns of communities
- A Rights based approach to drought relief measures undertaken by the government
- Planning for drought which is based on risk management rather than crisis management



our women

Encouraging and supporting the changing needs



Context

- The pivotal role of women as providers and users of water and guardians of the environment is seldom reflected in the process of planning and development
- All significant decisions of the management of the water resources in the villages are taken by men or male-dominated bodies
- This process of exclusion also reflects and replicates other traditional biases and hierarchies – along with women; other oppressed groups are also marginalized in decision-making around water
- There is an urgent need to equip and empower women to participate at all levels in water and natural resource management, and voice their concerns

Intervention

- Developed strategies and programs to involve women effectively in water and natural resource management
- Capacity building of women to actively participate in the decision making process in village level institutions

- Organization of Self Help Groups exclusively of women to ensure their access to economic resources
- Skill building training imparted to enable women to take up income generation activities and supplement their household income

Outcome

- Ensured women's access to and control over natural resources as primary stakeholders
- Organized women's groups for ensuring their participation in the decision-making process and provided them a platform for discussing key issues
 - Revival and regeneration of traditional water systems had an enormous impact on the material conditions of women's lives, reducing the time and effort they put into water collection
- Women-centered perspectives on issues of access and control of natural resources has been able to evolve and enforce effective systems of decision-making on sustainable use of these resources

Women have organized themselves to bear complete responsibility and voice their concern over water and natural resource management

