

WORLD WATER DAY 2007

FINDING LOCAL SOLUTIONS FOR WATER SCARCITY

March 22nd is World Water Day (WWD) and the theme for 2007 is Coping with Water Scarcity. This theme seems appropriate given that the United Nations (UN) predicts that by 2025, 1.8 billion people will live in regions or countries with “absolute water scarcity.” Many around the globe are actively working to improve this outlook and WWD serves to focus discussions on this issue and publicize worldwide efforts and successes.

This year, the UN has tied the need to address water scarcity issues to tangible policy goals. Specifically, the UN notes that the poverty and hunger in rural areas cannot be addressed without simultaneously addressing fair and equitable access to water. Drinking water, agriculture, sanitation and sustainable industry – none are possible without access to water and all are required to lift regions out of poverty. As an outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in 2002, a multi-tiered action plan has emerged that calls for action at all levels (international, national, regional and local) to address water resource protection and management, worldwide.

Only regional and national leaders can truly address larger issues such as groundwater rights and regional watershed diversions and use. That being said, small, well-focused groups coupled with inventive technical solutions can often make significant progress toward addressing local water issues. These local projects are far from being band-aids; in fact, if these projects were replicated and similar successes were enjoyed, the world might begin to close the gap between water needs and water availability.

International Development Enterprises, a research and development group based in Colorado, is demonstrating how low-cost, simple, household-level irrigation technologies can realistically address water access in the developing world. One technique that they promote is drip irrigation; frequently used by large, commercial farms, the technology has been adapted and scaled for use by individual farmers in the developing world. Conservative estimates show that drip irrigation cuts water use by up to 50% - this is especially significant when one considers that over 70% of global water use is devoted to agriculture and that the percentage jumps to almost 95% in some developing nations.

An ancient method for accumulating fresh water is now being scaled to supply water to millions. Man has collected rainwater since the dawn of human history, and today that effort is being coupled with low-cost, non-evaporative storage to address local water scarcity. The Gansu Research Institute for Water Conservancy (China) launched a pilot program targeting 2,000 households in 1995; the program has since expanded and currently provides each rural household with a \$50 (USD) subsidy to build one rainwater collection field on their roofs or on a paved courtyard, two underground tanks, and a piece of land for courtyard economy. The results are amazing; by 2002, the farmers in the area had built 23,500 greenhouses and planted 40,440 hectares of fruit trees and 22,500 hectares of cash crops. The average per capita income has increased from \$100 in 1995 to \$182 in 2002. The results were so impressive that the Chinese replicated the project on a

massive scale. Today, rainwater harvesting provides fresh water to 15 million people in 17 provinces and provides supplemental irrigation for over 1.2 million hectares of land.

Imagine these projects, and others like them, replicated over the entire globe. World Water Day is a call to action not just for political and social awareness of the issues, but also for recognition that widespread adoption and implementation of successful projects can make great strides towards reducing the magnitude of the challenge.

Editor's note: Each year, H2bid.com celebrates World Water Day by reducing the price on all bids and tenders to \$1.00. For more information, go to www.h2bid.com

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