

How long will schoolchildren be without safe drinking water?

By Neema Joshi

During my orientation program after joining the Sehgal Foundation team, my visit to the government middle school at village Banarasi, district Nuh, came with a surprise when the school principal told me that until recently there was no safe drinking water facility on the school premises. During summers, some students went home to drink water and missed the classes as they did not return. Water scarcity posed problems in midday meal cooking as well. The school relied on tanker water whose quality was a concern. As a result, a large number of children fell sick after drinking water from hand pumps or other contaminated water sources.

Per the 2018 report of UNICEF and WHO, the availability of basic drinking water facilities is limited to only 69 percent of schools in India. The provision of safe and adequate drinking water facilities in elementary schools is mandatory under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. Despite this, many government schools do not have adequate infrastructure and resources to provide a stimulating learning environment to the children and are deprived of basic facilities for drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene.



To address the issue of safe drinking water, a component of Sehgal Foundation's Transform Lives *one school at a time* initiative builds rainwater harvesting (RWH) systems with biosand filtration that provide safe drinking water to schoolchildren. This system collects rainwater for storage in over or underground tanks that passes through a filter before being available for

consumption. The school authorities in Banarasi welcomed the proposal to construct a RWH system, hoping it would solve their water problems, and their belief reaped positive results.

Set up in December 2018, the RWH system in Banarasi collects rainwater from the roof that is stored in two concrete water tanks having a capacity of 25,000 liters each. That is enough for water to be available throughout the year for drinking and cooking purposes. School authorities and students had a taste of how the system functioned with little rains. They now await the monsoons when the system will function full swing to provide safe drinking water to 150 students round the year.

Through this and other interventions such as infrastructure development for sanitation, hygiene, and school beautification, Sehgal Foundation is committed to transform government schools into safe, healthy, fun, and stimulating spaces that will encourage children to attend school regularly. One school at a time, the foundation team is harvesting rains through RWH to make water available. As of March 2018, the foundation has constructed 83 common storage rainwater harvesting systems for public and private buildings and seventeen high pressurized recharge wells that create freshwater pockets within saline aquifers.

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